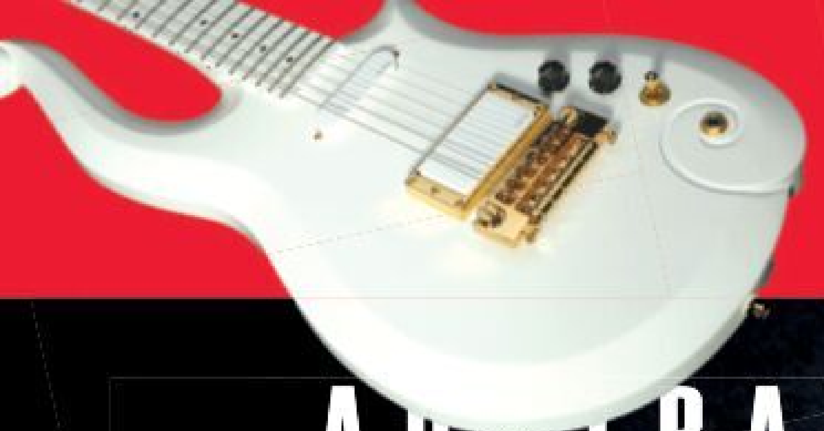

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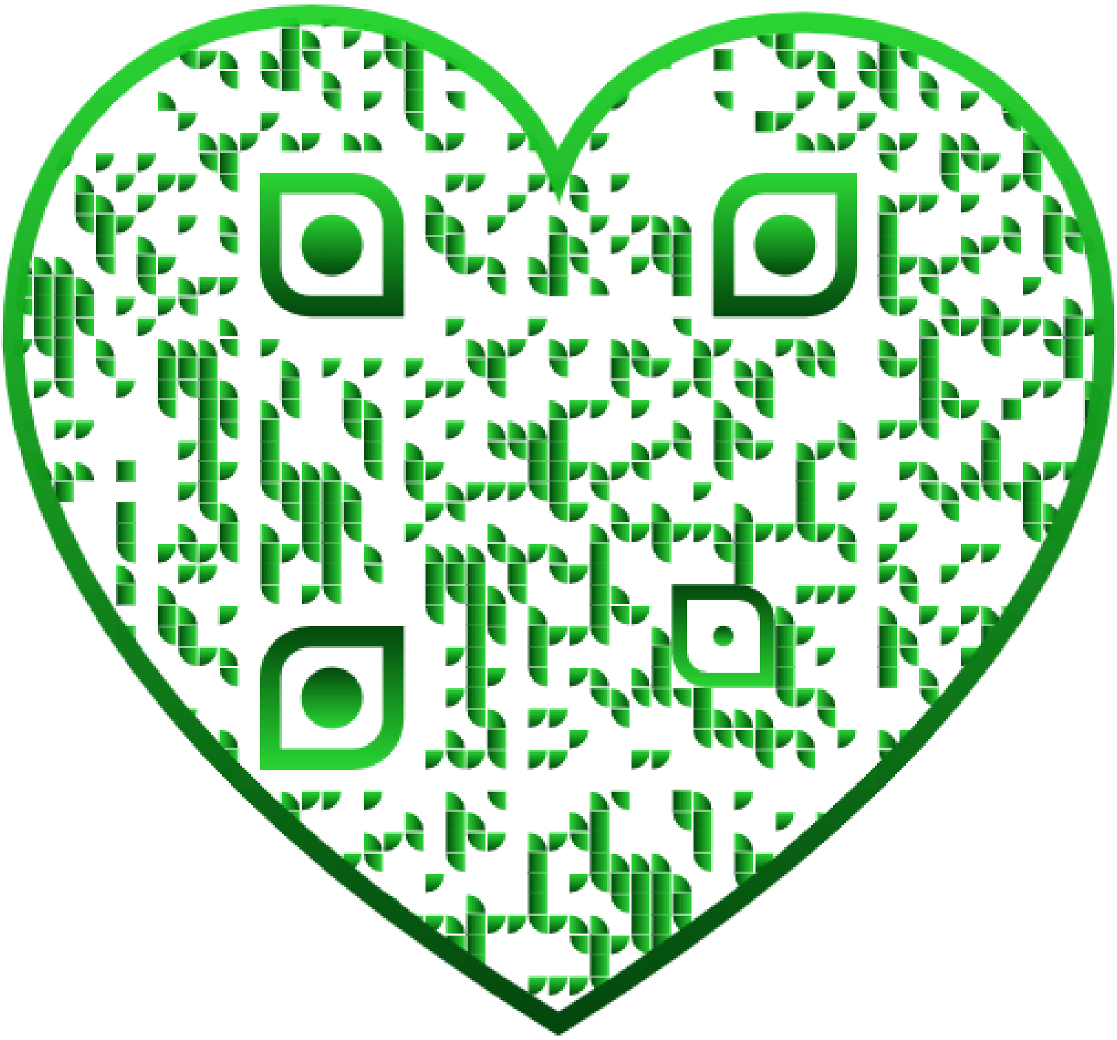

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GENE SIMMONS WANTS ACE FREHLEY FOR KISS' END OF THE ROAD TOUR

Gene Simmons has once again invited former Kiss guitarist Ace Frehley to play with the band during their ongoing farewell End of the Road World Tour. In a tweet marking Frehley's 71st birthday on April 27, Simmons wrote that the "invitations still stand", inviting him to "jump up on stage with us for encores". "The fans would love it," he added.

Frehley co-founded Kiss in 1973 with current members Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley, and former drummer Peter Criss. His initial tenure lasted almost 10 years, before he left the band in 1982. He rejoined in 1996, and left again in 2002, following the conclusion of what was originally planned to me the band's farewell tour.

Since then, Frehley and Simmons have worked together on multiple occasions, and the pair also joined forces in 2017 for a benefit concert for victims of Hurricane Harvey. But their relationship hit rockier territory in 2019, after Simmons said in an interview that Frehley was undependable and that he would probably never be able to fully rejoin the band.

"Ace and Peter Criss have gotten three chances," he said. "They were in and out of the band – fired – three times. For drugs, alcohol, bad behaviour, being unprofessional. So the only reason Ace and Peter were let go the first time, and then the second time and then the third time, is that they weren't carrying their load."

Words by Sam Roche

BOB DYLAN RE-RECORDS CLASSIC SONGS FOR NEW ANALOG MEDIUM

Bob Dylan has re-recorded a series of his classic songs with T Bone Burnett, which will be released on a new ultra-high-definition recording medium developed and patented by the multi-Grammy-winning producer.

Representing "the first breakthrough in analog sound reproduction in more than 70 years", the technology – dubbed Ionic Originals – yields the "pinnacle of recorded sound", Burnett says.

"It is archival quality," he says. "It is future-proof. It is one of one. Not only is an Ionic Original the equivalent of a painting, it is a painting."

The technology, Burnett explains, consists of a lacquer painted onto an aluminum disc, with a spiral etched into it by music, much in the same way as vinyl. He continues: "This painting, however, has the additional quality of containing that music, which can be heard by putting a stylus into the spiral and spinning it."

"When describing the quality that raises analog sound above digital sound, the word 'warmth' is often used," Burnett adds. "Analog sound has more depth, more harmonic complexity, more resonance, better imaging. Analog has more feel, more character, more touch. Digital sound is frozen. Analog sound is alive."

It's unclear at this stage which songs Bob Dylan has re-recorded to coincide with the medium's launch, when they'll be released, or even what hardware will be required to play them, but Burnett has formed a new company, NeoFidelity, Inc., with the intention of recording a range of artists using the technology, so we'll likely find out more info soon.

Words by Sam Roche

GRETSCH LAUNCHES REVAMPED G5021E RANCHER PENGUIN PARLOR

Back in January, Gretsch announced a number of changes to its lineup of electric and acoustic guitars. Among these was a revamping of the storied company's compact, affordably-priced G5021E Rancher Penguin Parlor acoustic-electric guitar. Available now, this new-look G5021E comes in some nice new finishes, along with a couple of other tweaks.

The guitar is still built with a solid spruce top and laminated maple back and sides, but now features a rosewood fretboard. However, that rosewood 'board only comes with the new Black, Mint Metallic and Shell Pink G5021Es – the previously available White G5021E boasts a Laurel fretboard.

Regardless of the fretboard, the G5021E's mahogany neck features 20 vintage-style frets and pearloid Neo-Classic thumbnail inlays. Sounds on the guitar can be amplified by its onboard Fishman Presys III pickup/preamp system, which features a built-in tuner, volume knob, and a three-band EQ comprising Bass, Middle and Treble controls.

The Gretsch G5021E Rancher Penguin Parlor acoustic-electric guitar is available now for $1,299. It joins the re-tooled Streamliner line, refreshed Electromatic Jet lineup and re-imagined Electromatic hollowbody collection in Gretsch's new-for-2022 lineup.

Words by Jackson Maxwell

AUSTRALIAN guitar™

#148

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FUTURE

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Photo: Lazy Bones

GOOD THANKS

THEY ARE A Novocastrian pop-punk quartet hell-bent on getting fists raised and vocal cords wrung – a mission they never fail to accomplish with four-chord belters as honest as they are anthemic.
YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Alex Lahey, Tigers Jaw and Teenage Joans.
YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT 'Yes Sir', a catchy and cathartic middle finger to crusty old dudes in the scene that try to rob young female artists of their agency. Dropped back in April, it marks somewhat of comeback for Good Thanks; 2018 saw the band come out swinging with a four-track EP, *Two Bottles In*, and they followed it up a year later with the explosive single 'Be Like Them'. But like most up-and-coming bands lacking the privilege to power on without shows, Good Thanks were knocked out of action by the pandemic. So, as the Australian touring scene roars back to life, so too have Good Thanks – and we couldn't be more stoked about it.

Photo: Sarah Haleem

SOUTH SUMMIT

THEY ARE Five of the bright stars in Perth's ever-burgeoning indie-rock scene, galvanised by a shared love of classic alt-rock and reggae fusion, with their sights set on dominating the national summer festival circuit. Their tonal palette is something to marvel at: shimmery, atmospheric twangs bend into scorching rock'n'roll solos, while passages of wah-flourished noodling and honeyed bass build the pillars of songs soon to be considered timeless.
YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Lime Cordiale, King Stingray and Spacey Jane.
YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Their soaring new single 'Tired Of Waiting', sure to become a staple in car stereos all around the nation. Its kaleidoscopic soundscape is instantly bewitching, with ultra-bright, melodic strumming slicked over with a subtle, yet striking warble that explodes into an overdriven onslaught of emotion in the chorus. Also make sure to check out the *Merlin's* EP from last January, drenched in character and colour with more than its fair share of earwormish moments.

Photo: Tim Ashton

RACING BIRDS

THEY ARE An alt-country duo – soulful singer Jeremy Strother and fret-belting bluesman Bobbie Lee Stamper – based out of Sydney, recording on laptops and embracing the shaken-up scene of the modern day, but evoking the rose-tinted analogue heyday of Southern California circa the late 1960s.
YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Jason Isbell, Blood Oranges and The Black Keys.
YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Their tantalisingly twangy and loveably loose debut, 'Lonesome Blue'. Its homely sound can traced down to its genesis, with Stamper saying he and Strother minted it on "a couple guitars, a laptop and whatever we could find around the garage to bang on". It was recorded in that very garage, too – "you could see daylight coming in through cracks in the walls, there were possums walking around in the rafters at night, and it was either boiling hot or freezing cold depending on the weather," Stamper says, but the pair "used that DIY feeling to give the record a bit of edge and energy".

Photo: Sophie May

SOPHIE MAY

SHE IS A Melbourne-native songster that stole the hearts of thousands before her first song even dropped. It was on TikTok that May fast became a star, sharing short clips of her captivating demos – rough and off-the-cuff, yet simultaneously sounding like she'd spent years perfecting them – that reel listeners in with an ultra-sharp hook and leave them begging for more en masse. We're predicting an explosion into the mainstream before the year's end.
YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Angie McMahon, Gracie Abrams and Holly Humberstone.
YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Both tracks on May's debut double A-side, 'With The Band' and 'Bruises & Scratches', which hone in on her smoky and soulful, yet notably restrained tenor and the gravelly twang of her Mustang to paint striking and cerebral soundscapes carrying bitterly heartfelt narratives. Beautifully produced and raw, yet dripping with character, May enthrals without so much as a beat to keep time with. We can't wait to see where she heads from here.

Photo: Ruby Bowland

SUZI

SHE IS The best reason to be on TikTok (aside from that one account with the dog that balances things on his head). Hailing from the heart of the Mornington Peninsula, Suzi wears her soul on her sleeve, wields a captivating strum and sings like her life depends on it. Her songs are raw, honest and emotive, twining flecks of folk and indie around a strong pillar of scorching, sun-kissed Australiana.
YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Camp Cope, Ruby Fields and The Hard Aches.
YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Her punchy and powerful new single, 'Everyone I've Met Hates Me', which couples soul-baring (and brutally relatable) lyrics with sharp, hooky instrumentation and crisp production that beckons repeat listens. And while it's unequivocally poignant on record, it's the kind of song that *truly* roars to life onstage – which is why we recommend heading to one of the six shows that Suzi has booked along the east coast between now and mid-June.

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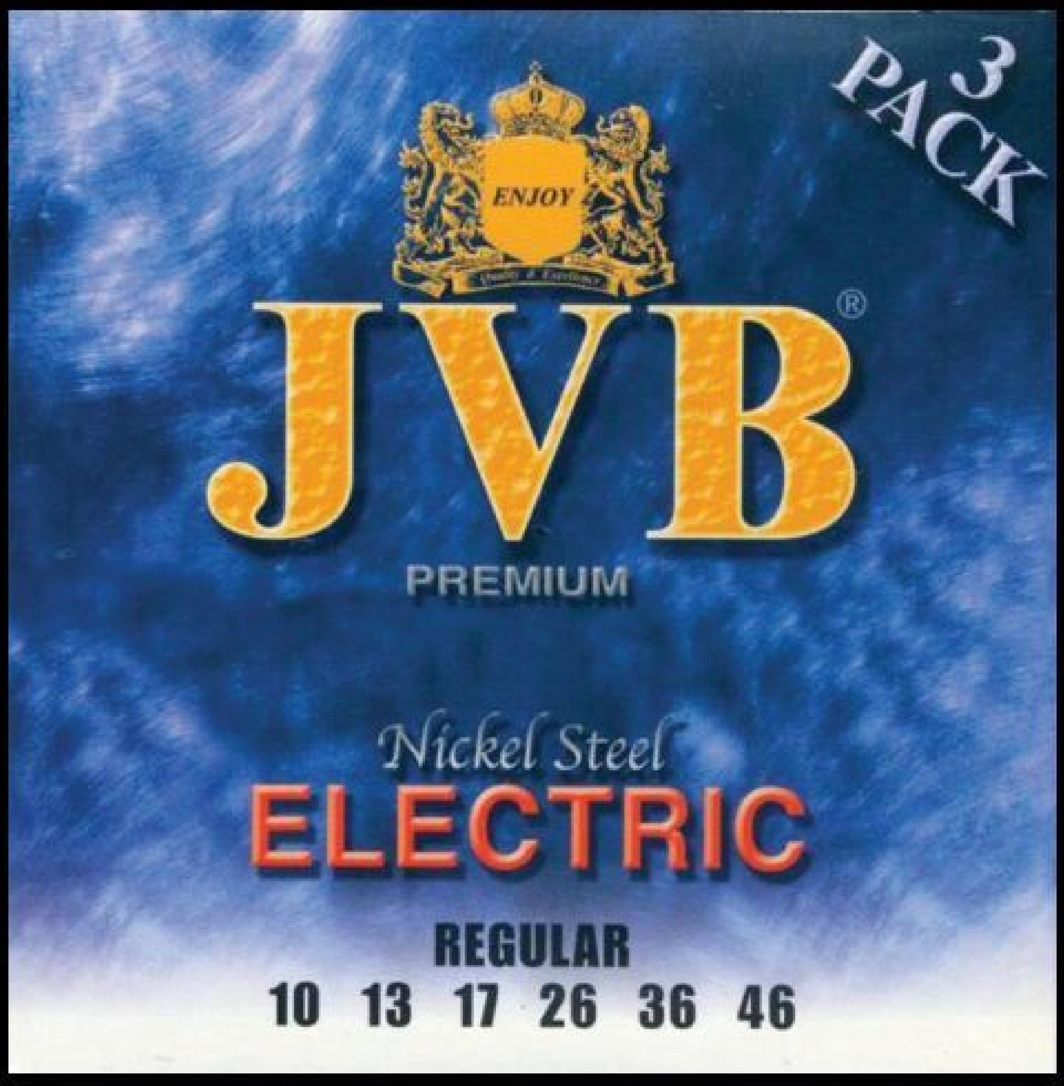

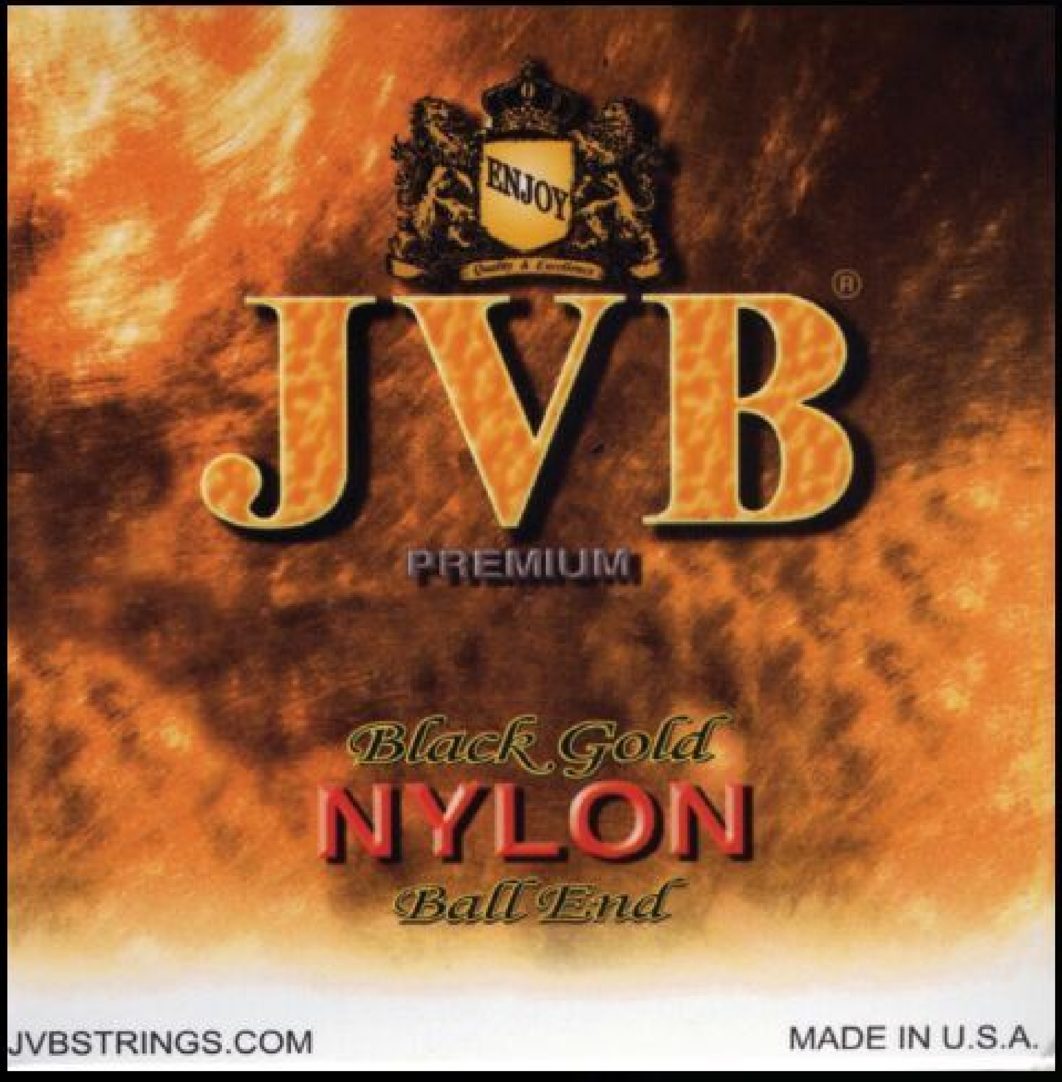

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ADAM JOHNSTONE + FERGUS SINCLAIR

HAILS FROM NAARM/MELBOURNE, VIC
PLAYS IN ROMERO
SOUNDS LIKE POST-2AM PUNK BAR ANTHEMS
LATEST DROP *TURN IT ON!* (LP OUT NOW VIA COOL DEATH / FEEL IT / EMI)

What's your current go-to guitar?
Johnstone: My current go-to is my American Fender Jazzmaster AVRI '62. I'd played a couple of friends' Jazzmasters in the studio and they always felt so smooth to me, plus I'd always loved that Jazzmaster tone. Previously I'd been playing a Fender Jaguar, which I also still love very much. When some friends pulled together to get me a new guitar for a birthday, I knew exactly what I was going for, and it's been the guitar I pick up first ever since.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
Sinclair: As an impressionable and curious grommet, there was absolutely nothing cooler than playing the axe. I fell in with a group of British invasion fanatics at school, and we would all obsess over both classic and modern UK indie bands like Joy Division, The Smiths and The Buzzcocks. I remember being totally blown away by the brooding melodicism and darker type of feel these bands had, and I spent many years trying to hone my own craft and feel. After fingerpicking my way into the abyss, using a classic guitar that was gifted to me at age five, my 18th birthday came with the promise of an upgrade. No word of a lie, there was a song that had a repeated vocal refrain of "destiny" playing in the shop when I locked eyes with a vintage wooden-varnish Squier Telecaster.

What inspires you as a player?
Johnstone: Punk music was what first really excited my playing, and then when I was shown Dinosaur Jr, J Mascis' playing completely blew me away. It was like I'd found the exact style and sound that resonated with me. His style has most definitely played a pivotal role in how I've grown as a guitarist. Then there's bands like The Jesus And Mary Chain, who showed me that you can make really simple things sound insanely beautiful and catchy. Country and blues music also had a major impact on me, in terms of improvising and getting more feeling into my playing. My first guitar teacher would always spend the first ten minutes of our lesson doing theory, and then we'd spend the last 20 minutes just jamming to whatever blues song he'd have that week.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
Sinclair: Not really, to be perfectly honest. The only pedal I've ever successfully sought out was a 1980s Boss Chorus CE-3, whilst I was in the midst of a gothic/post-punk phase. That thing is an absolute beast and has served me very well in my other projects (EYSØRES and Laughing Gear), but I mainly just really enjoy the Electro-Harmonix East River Drive on a Stratocaster's dirty bridge tone. I'm also a massive advocate for the versatility of the Mooer Blues Mood overdrive pedal, a critical piece of many puzzles whilst recording Turn It On! I've also always enjoyed playing into AC-30s.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
Johnstone: I've always wanted to get my hands on a proper vintage Jag or Jazzmaster from the '60s. Shame it'll cost your liver and kidneys to get.

What would your signature model look like?
Sinclair: Some type of variation on a Mustang, perhaps based on look and feel. I don't know if I'd change up the specs too much, but I would definitely print a glossy 'THANKS' on the back of every issue à la Jimmie Rogers.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive…
Johnstone: Alive, it would have to be either Keith Richards or J Mascis. I'd play 'Happy' with Keith and jam something heavy with J. Dead, it would be someone like Blind Willie Johnson or Mississippi John Hurt, and I'd just take in their incredible fingerpicking styles, because it's something that I certainly lack in.

Photo: Harley Jones

CALLUM ROBINSON

HAILS FROM MEANJIN/BRISBANE, QLD
PLAYS IN SEMANTICS
SOUNDS LIKE SOARING OCKER-ROCK SOAKED IN GOOD VIBES
LATEST DROP *PAINT ME BLUE* (LP OUT NOW VIA SIDEONEDUMMY / COOKING VINYL)

What's your current go-to guitar?
I've been playing an American Jazzmaster for over a year now! There's something about the neck, the size of the body suits my tall frame, and the pickups are hot and loud, but have great top-end definition. I can get my mid-range overdrives just as easily as sparkling cleans, and the middle switch is such a distinct Jazzmaster sound. I absolutely adore it! I just picked up a Gibson SG to mix it up a bit onstage and in the studio, so that should be fun too!

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
When I was eight, my dad got an acoustic guitar with a VHS course and a book. I remember it being the first instrument in my home, and my dad never got the hang of it, but I asked for a lesson and have been playing ever since. My first guitar was a secondhand Epiphone Les Paul that I got when I turned ten. I played my first-ever gigs with it when I was 15, and still have it in my studio now. She doesn't get played much, but the sentiment is too much to let go of.

What inspires you as a player?
To rattle off the top names, it's easily Costello, Billie Joe, J Mascis, Steve Earle, Albert Hammond Jr and Dylan Baldi. I could list hundreds of players that I love, but what these guys all have in common is an incredible punk edge to their respective genres. Each of these guys play hard and loud, and they match aggression with detail and nuance. They all tap into country guitar and old-time ballad songwriting, but they all transform the styles into their own thing. I hope to do the same with my guitar playing.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I'm a *huge* gear nerd. Right now I'm absolutely loving my Valvetone stack, and my studio partner owns a 100-watt Supersonic head which is just magical. Pedals are an endless pursuit, but the mainstays on my 'board are my HX Stomp, Carbon Copy, Slo Reverb and the Benson Fuzz. Overdrives are always changing, too, but I'm really digging the Limelight Overdrive by Electronic Audio Experiments – they developed it with the guitarist of Touché Amoré and its got the independent boost and drive switches that work really well with the Jazzmaster!

Do you have any 'white whales'?
I've always wanted a white Gretsch Falcon, but specifically Chris Cheney's one, signed. Chris, if you ever read this, give me a call. An old Greenback four-by-12 would be my dream speaker box. Big ticket items would have to be a proper pedal steel guitar, a Rickenbacker 330 and an original Firebird with those original pickups, in the non-reverse shape. What a riff stick.

What would your signature model look like?
I'm actually designing a custom guitar with a friend of mine who is a luthier. We're working on an offset body shape and a C-shape neck with rosewood frets and a cool headstock. It's very much inspired by the Jazzmaster. For hardware I'm thinking a hardtail bridge, maybe hipshot. I love Reverend's locking tuners so I'll see if Grover or Gotoh make something similar. The bridge pickup will be a Filtertron or TV Jones, lipstick in the neck, and if it's not too ugly I'll throw a mini humbucker in the middle. For the finish I'd go for a translucent, super thin nitro. Satin on the neck. Brownie points if I can throw a B bender on there.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive…
Dylan Baldi of Cloud Nothings for sure, that dude knows how to jam. I feel like half of their discography is this meticulously crafted and carefully written pop-rock, and the other half is this chaotic mess of shoegaze-y punk madness. I'd love to play bass or drums and just let him rip. For those reading, if you didn't know, Cloud Nothings are the greatest band in the world.

Photo: Hector Clark

JAMES MCKENDRICK

HAILS FROM NAARM/MELBOURNE, VIC
PLAYS IN VOID OF VISION
SOUNDS LIKE SENSUALLY CHARGED DIGI-CORE
LATEST DROP *CHRONICLES II: HEAVEN* (EP OUT NOW VIA UNFD)

What's your current go-to guitar?
My live guitar is an ESP LTD SCT607B. I think I came across it because at the time, it was the only baritone seven-string I could find that wasn't the typical pointy metal guitar. I'd also never owned a Telecaster at that point, so I guess it ticked that box for me. I love it because it just sounds great, despite me sweating all through it over the years – and it's very road worn, so it just feels more personal to me.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
I'd always listened to guitar-driven music, whether it was the more contemporary music my parents would play, or the rock and metal that I gravitated towards as I got older. My first guitar would've been one of those random brand "starter pack" red Stratocasters. There's not much of a story behind it, other than it being the victim of many botched Red Hot Chili Peppers riffs.

What inspires you as a player?
Dave Grohl is the reason I play music, his tenacity has always stuck with me and my playing. I'd then say Jeff Ling of Parkway Drive really shaped how I played and wrote guitar as a metal musician, and Jonathon Deiley of Northlane has been a big influence recently in my career. I think he uses the guitar in such a different way to lots of modern metal guitarists.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I definitely used to be, but since we've been digital live for a while, I've kind of moved away from that. We run Kempers live, so we let our producer, Lance Prenc, take the reins on the guitar tone/amps and go from there. I like messing around with his pedals when we record, but lately I've been messing around more in-the-box when I'm writing.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
I've never been one for super expensive music gear, but I've always wanted a nice off-white American Fender Stratocaster. An OG Block Letter 5150 would be pretty cool to own, too.

What would your signature model look like?
It'd have seven strings, a 28-inch scale length, an EverTune bridge, locking tuners, a Superstrat shape, a maple neck with a streaky ebony fretboard, a mahogany body with a maple top, and a contemporary inline headstock, upside down. Colour-wise, it would be matte black with a black pickguard... Can you tell I've thought about this before?

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...
Very basic, but I'd cry if Dave Grohl let me play 'Everlong' with him.

Photo: Nick Manuell

LEWIS MATTE

HAILS FROM NAARM/MELBOURNE, VIC
PLAYS IN SOPHISTICATED DINGO
SOUNDS LIKE FIZZY AND FRANTIC, HIGH-OCTANE SKATE-PUNK
LATEST DROP 'FEEDING TIME' (SINGLE OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

What's your current go-to guitar?
A Maton Mastersound that I found in the Music Swop Shop. It grabbed me as soon as I saw it on the wall, and after having a quick play, I knew it had to be mine. I love how it feels like a smaller guitar, and I'm such a fan of the fact you can switch between single coils and humbucker pickups!

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
My mum enrolled me in guitar lessons at school when I was around 10/11. It felt like I had no natural knack for understanding how to make music with the guitar – to be honest, I was just addicted to the rote learning element and being rewarded with positive reinforcement, so I didn't seem to stop practising. With two great guitar teachers, I kept at it, and I found that I loved being onstage. It was only after school, when I seemed to find more time with myself, that my ears really started to understand how my playing could more naturally fit in with songs and performing with others. It's here that a passion for songwriting was forged and I would attach that to my biggest love for the guitar today.

What inspires you as a player?
In the very early days, back when I first started playing in primary school, I was absolutely obsessed with U2 and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Later in high school, I found myself fall in love with anything The Strokes would put out. And nowadays, I am a big fan of any guitarist who blends rhythm and lead playing in the one part as seamlessly or creatively as possible. I think Greg Rietwyk of Press Club is a prime example – I love listening to his parts in their songs, as I think as the sole guitarist in the band, he cuts through with all the power you expect from a rhythm part, but then throws in plenty of colour and intricacy in his carefully placed lead runs.

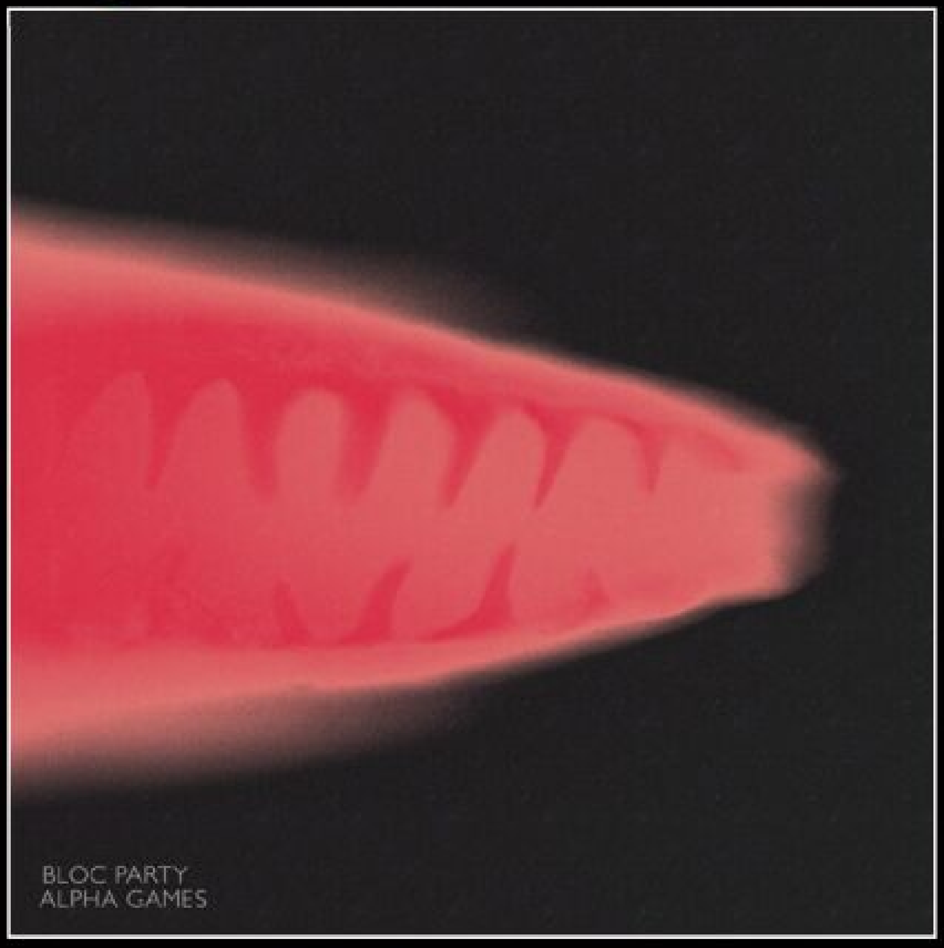
Are you much of a gear nerd?
I wouldn't say I'm much of a gear nerd, but I do know what I like once I find it. My favourite pedal is definitely the T-Rex Dr. Swamp Dual Distortion – I have one channel of this pedal running at all times, as it provides the right amount of grit and grunt that seems to improve the tone of my guitar. I also don't think I could go without my Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi fuzz pedal. It's far too big for what it does, takes a different power cable input than all my other pedals, behaves differently on every stage, and barely works unless you kick the switch the right way – but I think the wall of sound it produces is just ridiculous, and it finds its way onto more Dingo recordings than I ever think it will.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
One day, I think I would love to have a non-reverse Gibson Firebird in a blue finish with a white pickguard. Especially if it has a tremolo arm and dot inlays on the frets. I mean, I've never played one, but I just think they look divine.

What would your signature model look like?
I would like a blue/green finish on a double cutaway body with a white pickguard, a P-90 pickup in the front and a Strat-style single coil in the back – maybe with a humbucker style silver guard over it, though – next to a long tremolo arm à la a Fender Jag. I think it should have a rosewood neck with white dot inlays on the frets. The headstock should also be rosewood in a Fender style, without the round head at the end of it.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...
I would love to sit with Johnny Marr and rip through 'This Charming Man' by The Smiths. I think it's the song that typifies a genuinely cool guitar melody that isn't overly "guitary", but is genuinely an impressive riff to play.

TOP PICK



BLOC PARTY

Alpha Games

INFECTIOUS / BMG

Six years in the making, Bloc Party had a whole damn lot of ground to cover on their sixth full-length effort – personal, political and cultural – so it's no surprise that *Alpha Games* is a record that, while very dense, feels strikingly human. It oscillates between warmness and chaos, with frontman Kele Okereke wearing his heart on his sleeve in each bewitching tale of love, sex, betrayal and enmity.

It veers well into melodramatic territory, but that's trademark Bloc Party – and here, moreso than ever, their theatricality never feels campy. As always, Okereke's tenor is very character-driven: at times he's snarky, quippy and edgy, at others smoky and swaggering, and in a few standout moments, heartfelt and raw. The band match his serpentine delivery, offering runs that leap from math-y, widescreen indie-rock to post-dancefloor funk and gunslinging rock 'n' roll.

It echoes the punchiness of Bloc Party's heyday, which is no coincidence: after diving deep down the synthpop rabbithole on 2016's *Hymns*, they were drawn back to their shreddy, grit-inflected roots for a tour performing their debut long-player, 2005's *Silent Alarm*, in full. 2020 saw them head to the studio with aims to replicate that record's bite, but galvanised by 15 years of experimentation, they instead drew up something much more colourful and dynamic.

There are wallops of hooky, riff-driven intensity – best heard on the mosh-primed 'Callum Is A Snake' – but they're offset by softer, more glittery and emotive cuts like 'Of Things Yet To Come'. These may have felt like mood-killers in other contexts, but here they feel absolutely crucial; they're not shoehorned in to make the catchier tracks hit harder, but serve as some the record's strongest tracks on their own accord.

It's hard to envision *Alpha Games* existing at any other point on Bloc Party's timeline: 'Sex Magik' and 'You Should Know The Truth' feel informed by the gloss and gorgeousness of *Hymns*, while 'In Situ' hits the sweaty, heady, club-ready highs of 2009's *Intimacy*, and 'If We Get Caught' recalls the smitten rose tint of 'I Still Remember' from 2007's *A Weekend In The City*.

All in all, *Alpha Games* is by far Bloc Party's best record yet. It's their most well-rounded, engaging and audacious effort, with not a second of filler in earshot. It's without a doubt that in a decade from now, we'll consider this disc more essential than *Silent Alarm* could have ever dreamt to be.

WORDS: MATT DORIA

BOB VYLAN

Price Of Life

GHOST THEATRE

Politics have been a staple of great punk since the genre's very inception, but as the 2020s see the world descend into a flavour of chaos we couldn't have imagined 30 years ago, bands need to do much more than just rage against the machine – they need to *f***ing destroy it*. Over a soundscape oscillating between belting, grit-laden punk guitars and punchy, bass-inflected hip-hop beats, Bob Vylan take a fierce first step on their incendiary second album. The London duo show no mercy in their lyrical attacks on capitalists, royalists, racists and the general scourge of right-wing regressivism, all while delivering sharp and moshable tunes that'll keep stuck in your head for weeks on end.

ELIZA & THE DELUSIONALS

Now And Then

COOKING VINYL

As old as it makes us feel to see the pop and rock of the late '90s played for nostalgia, we'll admit it's cool to see that scratchy, pseudo-grungy glimmer come back in vogue. There's no question about that being Eliza & The Delusionals' biggest source of inspiration, but on *Now And Then*, it doesn't feel they've just bashed up an celebration of the VHS and Tamagotchi age. It's more genuine and considered, with a high-res sheen and widescreen scope that plays out like an evolution of those Mazzy Star-gazing melodies and tongue-in-cheek Avril-isms, not just a copy of them. Especially brilliant is the way Kurt Skuse and Ashley Martin trapeze around those glittery, luminescent synths. Their fretwork is jangly and melodic, soaring and spacey where it counts but always impossibly tight, paving the way for Eliza Klatt's bubbly and wistful tenor to shine.

JAGUAR JONZE

Bunny Mode

NETTWERK

The title *Bunny Mode* may be more than a tad misleading here, because on her powerful, piercing and paradigm-shattering debut LP, Jaguar Jonze is fiercely dominant and galvanised in her confidence. Equally poignant and punchy are her merciless hits on the patriarchy, politics and music industry bullshit, while her swaggering grooves and steely hooks brand the mix with a spirited character that feels just as alluring as it is empowering. What stands out most is how *Bunny Mode* builds on the smoky, pseudo-Western bite of last year's *Antihero* EP, rounding it out with a broader palette of shimmery, yet evermore striking pop influences.It allows Jonze the flexibility to lead more with her compelling vocal prowess, while there's plenty of space left free for her to shred up a storm when the time calls for it.

KING GIZZARD AND THE LIZARD WIZARD

Omnium Gatherum

INDEPENDENT

In true King Gizz fashion, *Omnium Gatherum* is fuzzy, warm, colourful and weird, but it's also surprisingly unpredictable – a true feat of feats for a band that's already done everything from black metal to dream-pop. It can be a daunting task to take in all at once, but set aside the time, get yourself comfy, dim the lights and settle in for a truly mind-melting journey through all of the band's multifarious peaks and valleys. Highlights come in the metallic, crunched-out 'Gaia', the silky and twee 'Magenta Mountain', the Beastie Boys-channeling 'Sadie Sorceress' and the heady, funk-soaked 'Presumptuous'.

THE LINDA LINDAS

Growing Up

EPITAPH

It's hard to believe *Growing Up* spans just 26 minutes, as every track is stuffed from start to end with colour and character. The quartet run the full gamut of pop-punk staples, from bratty, snarling quippery ('Fine') and off-kilter cheesiness ('Nuno') to fiery riot grrrl anthemery ('Racist, Sexist Boy') and mid-tempo daziness ('Cuántas Vertes'). Sure, the fact they're all so young, and the way they've shattered milestones so quickly are both great talking points – but at the end of the day, all that matters is the quality of the music. And this music is f***ing brilliant. It's not the most innovative record, but that actually works to The Linda Lindas' strengths: here, they prove without a sliver doubt that despite their relative greenness, they know how to make a banging tune (or ten). Where they go from here? Now that's *really* exciting.

PROPER.

The Great American Novel

FATHER/DAUGHTER

"Third time's the charm," so goes the age-old adage, but on Proper.'s third full-length effort, the Brooklyn pop-punkers play more dutifully with coal than any sort of charm. Make no mistake, *The Great American Novel* is dark, with a stunningly broad palette of shreddage tapping into dour grunge ('Jean'), distortion-drenched hardcore ('McConnell') and heartrending emo ('Americana'). It's the band's most refined work yet, sporting their hardest-hitting lyrics and riffs that hit even harder. Bartees Strange's production is downright phenomenal too, every pummelling hook and soaring melody primed for maximum impact. On 'Shuck & Jive', frontman Erik Garlington declares that Proper. are "no longer underrated, just underfunded" – a bold claim, but one proven absolutely true by this LP.

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MIDDLE KIDS

GROOVIN THE MOO

WHERE
PRINCE OF WALES SHOWGROUNDS BENDIGO, VICTORIA

WHEN
SATURDAY APRIL 30TH, 2022

REVIEW
MATT DORIA

PHOTOS
ASH CAYGILL, CHLOE HALL AND JOSEPH MAYERS

There's no other festival in Australia that feels like Groovin The Moo. While it's undoubtedly one of the country's biggest live music events, with lineups packed from top to bottom with acts that could easily headline festivals of their own, there's always a distinct homeliness to it. Part of that comes courtesy of its regional setting: the air smells like real, genuine fresh air, the countryside sprawls on in the distance, and when the night rolls in, you can see *actual* stars glittering above the figurative ones onstage.

Two years out of action, Groovin's return to Bendigo came with an avalanche of good vibes. Walking through the gates, the excitement buzzed, the festival fashion was immaculate, and rarely did we see a face void of a smile – an energy only intensified by **Telenova**. Opening the Cattleyard stage to an impressively dense crowd (given their late-morning slot), the Melbourne troupe put on a mesmerising set of summery, cinematic indie-pop. Their widescreen soundscapes translated uniquely to the stage, lacking the crisp pomp and atmospheric shimmer of their studio work, but filling in the gaps with an authenticity and liveliness that can often be lost on record.

Jem Pryse nabbed the local slot assigned by triple j Unearthed, and from the moment he strummed the first silky and bright notes of 'Turing Reality Into Dreams', it was clear why he so acutely deserved it. Pryse's surfy, sepia-toned indie-rock felt tailor-made for Groovin, treating early arrivers to a youthful and spirited performance that set a buoyant tone for the rest of the day. Notable, too, was the addition of saxophonist Harry Godfrey in Pryse's backing band, adding a smoky, soulful glow to songs that already teemed with colour and snap.

Keeping the bubbly, wholesome vibe alive was Brissy-native luminary **Hope D**, whose punchy alt-pop added some tasteful fire to the fray. She and her cohort – flanked by the Strat-wielding Ainslie Dimmock and Bridget Brandolini, while D herself brought some glittering levity with an Acoustasonic Tele – kicked off with an unreleased cut called 'Senseless'. Like its title implies, it was an absolute rager, angsty and biting with a PVRISian emo-pop energy that fast had passersby stopped in their tracks. Dimmock stole the spotlight on 'Cash Only' with her searing, Prince-channelling solo, while the trio all shone in their own ways for a dark and stormy, swaggering cover of 'Toxic' by Britney Spears.

Offering a solid handful of punters here their first (and probably only) circle pit experience, **RedHook** stormed the stage with meteoric aplomb. They had the same issue at Groovin as they did at UNIFY last month, where their glitchy, pseudo-sleazy nu-metal didn't translate perfectly to the festival atmosphere. It was moreso glaring here, given the rest of the bill's pop- and indie-leaning fare, but after being plied with a few warmup tunes, the crowd took to RedHook's idiosyncratic flair with open arms. The star of the show was shredder Craig Wilkinson, whose dirty, overdriven Tele riffs made an easy lunch of the speaker setup.

Whoever mixed the last four sets must have ducked out for a smoke break when **Sycco** (aka Sasha McLeod) took to the triple j stage, because

HOPE D

ALICE IVY

while her predecessors all sounded sharp and well-balanced, her set was hit with a largely inconsistent mix. When it was audible, McLeod's strumming was clean and dry, and added a radiant texture to the synth-driven palette. The guitars truly shone on the woozy and warbly 'Germs', with a stunning, psych-tinged solo taking things far beyond "the next level".

Leaning heavily on highlights from their full-length debut, 2018's *Lost Friends*, **Middle Kids** delivered the best set of the whole day. It was a more lowkey affair, with their easygoing grooves and airy melodies offering reprieve from the high-energy acts that played before them. It was also the first Middle Kids show attended by the two-year-old kid of frontwoman Hannah Joy and bassist Tim Fitz, who we'd have to imagine was pretty dang proud of their rockin' 'n' rollin' mum and dad.

Much like their music on record, **Hockey Dad**'s set was... Whelming. It wasn't bad, by any stretch, but it wasn't particularly *good* either. But that's their schtick, really: the band deal in perfectly serviceable indie-rock designed meticulously for mass consumption – they're the McDonald's of triple j-baiting pinger-pop. But we couldn't fault the performance – Zach Stephenson's dusty, ever-so-slightly crunchy Tele chords are sharp and strike with a solid *oomph*. They stuck to the mix like old gum to pavement, Stephenson whipping out decently enjoyable runs of warm and homely riffage to match his similarly catchy vocal melodies.

Montaigne, on the other hand, aimed to stun for the full 40 minutes of her set, and – as she tends to – pulled it off without a hitch. Though scant on guitars – an acoustic cameoed on 'Clip My Wings', but this was otherwise a bass and keys-centric affair – we'd be remiss not to address how downright stunning Jess Cerro's performance was. The art-pop prodigy soared with every tight and kaleidoscopic track, her tenor opulent and riveting, and her movement, trapezing around the stage like the lead in an old Disney musical, was impassioned and bewitching.

We have to give props to **Polaris** for even showing up to their Groovin set, with frontman Jamie Hails and guitarist Ryan Siew both whacked out of sorts by illness. They crushed it nonetheless, Hails belting out a faultless onslaught of barbed, bloodthirsty screams in spite of a punishing throat infection, and Siew wreaking havoc on his fretboard without a note off-beat. The band's setlist showed equal love for their two albums, though unsurprisingly, it was their monstrous cover of 'Black Fingernails, Red Wine' by Eskimo Joe (which they minted for *Like A Version* two years back) that really set the triple j stage alight.

As veritable icons of Australian rock, **Spiderbait** were met with deafening acclaim for their golden-hour set. The majority of us here grew up jamming out to songs like 'Calypso' and 'F***en Awesome' – and let's be real, the band's appearance at the Moo was quite a shameless play of the nostalgia card. But they were all about it, happily geeing up the crowd with call-and-response chants, extended solos, and the kind of OTT banter that only Kram can pull off in earnest. And though this meant they only played a handful of songs, every last one felt timeless and explosive.

Filling in for the stoner-pop debonairs in Milky Chance (who dropped out due to complications with COVID-19 restrictions in Europe), **Lime Cordiale** made a solid case for their potential as future Groovin headliners. Studded with hits primed for singalongs and made ever more striking with live horns, their set was ceaselessly enrapturing. Oli and Louis Leimbach gelled with all of the jaunty, laidback chemistry that made them stars of Australian pop-rock, grooving through their litany of surfy, smoky bangers with unerring spirit and zest.

The sole exports on our radar for this year's edition, **Wolf Alice** sent Groovin '22 out on the highest note humanly possible, sandwiching a run of their dreamier, more groove-oriented cuts (largely pulled from last year's *Blue Weekend* record) between wallops of the belting, punk-infused pop-rock the British crew cut their teeth on. Especially poignant was the juxtaposition of 'How Can I Make It OK?' and 'Play The Greatest Hits', with the former's heavenly sway making the later's venomous and volcanic energy all the more intense.

None of the bill's remaining acts (**Hilltop Hoods** and **Peking Duk** on the main two stages) piqued our fancy, so the night came to an end at the rather quaint time of 8:30pm. We're not complaining, though – after nine hours of nigh-on endless euphoria, we were struggling to keep our knees from buckling. More than anything, we were preemptively planning our outfits and dream lineups for Groovin '23... ag

LIME CORDIALE

TEENAGE JOANS

UNIFY GATHERING

WHERE
TARWIN MEADOWS
GIPPSLAND, VICTORIA

WHEN
FRIDAY MARCH 11TH
AND SATURDAY 12TH, 2022

REVIEW
MATT DORIA

PHOTOS
DANI BROWN

For the first time in UNIFY's eight-year history (notwithstanding, of course, the cancelled '21 edition), rain didn't strike the ground once all weekend. It was odd – we'd become accustomed to flooded tents and muddy moshes – but you'd nary hear a complaint. It wasn't overbearingly hot, either – it was like the gods of weather had felt sympathy for us (a welcomed change from their usual spite), having gone two full years without a heavy music festival of this caliber, and as such offered us the optimal atmosphere for peak mosh brilliance.

Perfect weather wasn't the only thing different about this year's Gathering. It felt a little more laidback, compared to the typically turbulent UNIFYs of years past. Crowds felt more spacious, the campsites were quieter, and the morning dew smelt much less intensely of hangover spew. The festival ran at less than half the capacity it normally does – 7,000 punters this year, down from 15,000 in 2020 – and though we did miss the raucous party vibes that larger scope brings, it was nice to be eased back into the UNIFY Gathering atmosphere (which can, at times, become quite profoundly batshit).

Our first act of the weekend was **Bloom**, a melodic hardcore quintet from Sydney whose energy rippled through the arena with every bitter, biting chug of Oli Butler's lead guitar and every walloping thrash of Jack Van Vliet's cymbals. They certainly weren't as tight as they are on record, and there were some moments where it seemed as though an extra few rehearsals could've done them well – but what they lacked in stability, they made up for tenfold in passion. Butler and co-shredder Jarod Mclaren played with a bewitching chemistry, and Mclaren's singing gelled perfectly with Jono Hawkey's grisly screams.

Dream On Dreamer's set was bittersweet, marking one of the last times – if not *the* last time – most of us there would see them live, with their plans to disband announced over two years ago. Though it's no surprise that cuts from 2011's *Heartbound* scored the warmest reception, it was the tracks from their swansong record, *What If I Told You It Doesn't Get Better*, that truly shone brightest on stage.

While UNIFY marked another step towards Dream On Dreamer's imminent death, it was the opposite for **Teen Jesus And The Jean Teasers**, who – armed with a slew of new bangers in tow – delivered one of the weekend's most memorable sets. The unreleased 'Bull Dragon' wowed with its red-hot groove and earwormish hook, while 'AHHHH!' proved fittingly titled when it sent the crowd into an energised flurry. The biggest standout of their set, though, was an authentically snarky, amped-up cover of Avril Lavigne's 2007 classic 'Girlfriend' – which, no doubt thanks to Teen Jesus, ended up being a campsite anthem on the Friday night.

Honing in on his heavier, more djenty material, **Plini**'s set proved that an outdoor festival can indeed foster the right setting for some instrumental prog. And though it was immediately clear that he and his band had rehearsed the hell out of every song they played, it was the brief moments of improvised soloing – like an extended "conversation" Plini had with his guitarist at the end of closing number 'Electric Sunrise' – that really blew our minds. Oh, what we'd give to be a fly on the wall during one of their jam sessions…

Gravemind were easily the heaviest band we caught on day one of UNIFY, but they were also the weakest. Generic, no-frills metalcore doesn't really tickle our fancy anymore – not when there are so many more interesting, more sonically exciting and dynamic artists to see at the festival – so there was no reason to stick around for more than a few (greatly underwhelming) songs.

WAAX, on the other hand, came out swinging with their searing and scintillating, vibey-as-f***

STARVE

punk. When he joined the band in 2019 – shortly before the release of their debut LP, *Big Grief* – lead guitarist James Gatling struggled to gel with their inimitable dynamic. But after a few years in the fray, he's become their crutch, tearing up his fretboard with vicious aplomb in WAAX's punishingly short 30-minute set. Like with Teen Jesus', the highlight of WAAX's set was a cover of an '07 pop-rock gem: this time, My Chemical Romance's 'Teenagers'.

Nostalgia continued to reign for **Ocean Grove**'s career-spanning set, with former frontman Luke Holmes swinging through to rock the mic on 'Lights On Kind Of Lover' and 'Stratosphere Love'. Unannounced, his return offered the biggest "wow" moment of UNIFY '22, and even after three years out of action – his last set with OG being at UNIFY '19 – Holmes proved that he still has one of the best voices in Australian metal. New tunes like 'Cali Sun' and 'Silver Lining' soared with Dale Tanner at the helm, though, and new touring axeman Andy Szetho delivered a stunning showcase of his skills.

Trophy Eyes continued the trend of rose-tinted throwbacks, performing their breakout record, 2016's *Chemical Miracle*, in full. But even though it remains one of the best albums of the 2010s, it fell depressingly flat on the UNIFY stage, with messy playing from Andrew Hallett and weak, fractured vocal runs from John Floreani (who relied far too heavily on the "sing one line, then point the mic to the crowd to fill in the blanks" trope). Trophy Eyes' UNIFY sets have always been phenomenal, but with round four, they completely dropped the ball.

Speaking of which, day one of UNIFY '22 was headlined by **The Amity Affliction**. So, after an early night, we returned to the arena early on Saturday arvo with spirits high and elbows primed for swingin'. First up on the agenda were **Pridelands**, who set a high benchmark with their viciously heavy, though melodically charged metalcore. Obvious highlight came in tracks from their recent long-player *Light Bends*, with Liam Fowler's monstrous riffs as crisp as they were callous.

Redhook's off-kilter nu-metal felt ill-suited for UNIFY – they're tight and hot-tempered in a club setting, but in the open air, seemed a little out of their element. Nevertheless, Emmy Mack and co. delivered a strong performance, with set-closer 'Bad Decisions' – featuring almost every female performer on the festival's lineup – making for an especially explosive climax.

Showcasing cuts from last year's spellbinding *Help Me, Help You* record, **Stepson** hit the stage with a kind of liveliness that made yesterday's most energetic acts look like twee bluegrass outfits. They evoked the glory days of late-'90s emo, with guitarists Nick Bennett and Robert Suthern pouring an intense amount of emotion into their fiery and raw fretwork. The album tracks were incredible, of course, but a hint at Stepson's new direction, the brutish and poignant 'This Is How It Feels', proved that their best work is yet to come.

It's hard to imagine some of the more pop-leaning bands on this year's UNIFY existing without **Short Stack**. They were an entry point into pop-punk for many an Australian millennial, and so it came as no shock that tracks from their 2010 debut, *Stack Is The New Black*, went down to rapturous acclaim. Their set was defined by its schtick – giant beach balls, cheesy banter they'd clearly rehearsed – but the performance certainly didn't require it; like Australia's answer to Blink-182, Short Stack used their comedic edge to punctuate genuinely fantastic songs, played with the spirit and skill you only get when you've been friends with your bandmates for decades.

Bugs may not be at that same veteran status, but the Brisbane trio aren't far off. Their set – heavy on hooky, singalong-ready belters from their recent fourth album, *Cooties* – shone with youthful buoyancy and a summery, feelgood vibe that felt perfectly suited to their 5:30pm slot. Bugs were another band to make waves with a cover, theirs taking us back to the halcyon days of 1999 with a scratchy, soulful rendition of Tal Bachman's 'She's So High'.

Few bands have established themselves as staples of the scene quite as quickly as **Teenage Joans** have. The Adelaidian punk-pop duo dropped their debut EP, *Taste Of Me*, just shy of a year ago, yet they've already become one of the most anticipated acts on any bill they play. UNIFY was no different, with their crowd thick and buzzing with hype from the moment they burst onstage. Cosplaying their best Disney Channel approximation of goth culture, Teenage Joans kicked off with the unreleased 'Girls Don't Cry', a snarling and venomous "f*** you" to the countless cishet men that make being a woman in punk hell. All the *Taste Of Me* tunes went down a treat, but were greatly usurped by slivers of its as-yet-untitled follow-up – 'Terrible' in particular, with its downright volcanic crescendo.

Playing their first – and possibly only – set in almost six years, **Stories** delivered the kind of set that entire books are written about: every second felt like a memory in the making, with cuts from the Sydney band's sole studio album, *The Youth To Become*, having been galvanised as cult classics and respected here as such. It was like Stories had spent the last six years preparing for this set – and goddamn, how we hope it wasn't *actually* a one-off comeback.

It's here that we (regrettably) had to throw in the towel, though by all reports from our sources on the ground, the rest of the bill – pop-punk stalwarts **Yours Truly** and **Slowly Slowly**, digicore deviants **Thornhill** and the crème de la crème of ocker punk, **Violent Soho** – offered a riveting end to the long-awaited comeback of Australia's best rock festival. If it's even a quarter as fun as this year's edition, we truly cannot wait for UNIFY '23.

BUGS

POLISH CLUB
PRESS CLUB

WHERE
THE CROXTON BANDROOM
MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

WHEN
SATURDAY APRIL 30TH, 2022

REVIEW
MATT DORIA

PHOTOS
TOM WILKINSON

After being delayed twice from last September, April 2022 saw Polish Club *finally* able to showcase their third studio album – the bright and bouncy (albeit rather underwhelming) *Now We're Cookin'* – live in concert. Melbourne came lucky last on the duo's itinerary, with the eight shows preceding this set at the Croxton effectively serving as warmups for this big, bombastic blowout of scorching hot rock 'n' roll.

It feels right to have ended things here, partially because Press Club – who've held tightly onto this tour through every punishing setback, and only missed the first two shows of it when one of their own came down with The Spicy Cough™ – hail from the concrete jungle of culture and craft beer that is Brunswick, just a creek away from the Croxton's home of Thornbury. Having seen the band play in a handful of cities up and down the east coast of Australia, we can say with certainty that it's here in Melbourne – at home – that Press Club shine the brightest.

No stranger to this stage, frontwoman Nat Foster slinked around it like she was possessed by the devil, every honest and heartfelt lyric belting from her chest with a stunning mix of ferocity and finesse. Her tenor soared, scratchy and raw like she'd forcibly wrenched each line from her soul and sacrificed it to the masses in realtime. Matching her zeal was Greg Rietwyk, who despite being Press Club's only guitarist, held the entire set on his shoulders with his crunchy and convulsive shredding.

While distortion sits at the core of his tone, there's a melodiousness to Rietwyk's playing that elevates what could've been otherwise basic pubcore tunes into colourful – almost cinematic – punk anthems. There was a handful of those in the setlist that we'd never heard before – one very fittingly called 'Cancelled', a painfully relatable cut for any artists in the crowd – and if their recorded counterparts are even half as eruptive as they sounded live, we already know the band's new album will outright destroy its two predecessors.

The most memorable new song is one that built progressively in vigour, from a slow-burning pseudo-ballad into a vicious punk rager, with a melodic hook that felt tailored for singalongs at future gigs. Padding out the set was a handful of gems from 2018's *Low Teens* – 'My Body's Changing' remains one of the most poignant punk songs of the last decade, and there's a good reason why 'Suburbia' is still Press Club's go-to set closer after four years. It felt like 2019's *Wasted Energy* was unfairly snubbed in the setlist, but with a headline tour fast approaching, there are hopes we'll see more love shown to that record there.

Nevertheless, Press Club were tight and on point for every second of their 40-minute set. The same, annoyingly, can't be said for Polish Club. They

started off on a roll: flanked by touring axeman Dan Cunningham and bassist Wade Keighran, the Sydney duo's sound was rich and expansive, with the blistering bite of 'Whack' and fiery grooves of 'Stop For A Minute' – the two best songs on *Now We're Cookin'* – making for one hell of an explosive opening.

We'll admit that we didn't walk into this show with the highest hopes. For the first few gigs we saw Polish Club play as a four-piece, they were less than stellar – it felt like they'd simply piled more ingredients onto their well-refined formula, overly complicating something that was always meant to be simple. But it seems they've since bashed out the kinks, with Cunningham and Keighran now adding colour and texture that elevates the tried-and-true Polish Club sound into a much more dynamic and exciting version of it.

The classic 'Beeping' was a perfect example of this, with its punkish, rockabilly-inspired runs given a swaggering wallop of theatricality. Ditto for *Iguana* highlight 'Clarity', which soared with an extra lick of shimmer from Cunningham's melodically charged fretting. Of course, the star of the show was still singer/shredder David Novak, who – armed with his solidbody Gretsch Duo Jet, which hit the mix *so* much harder than his old staple, an Epiphone Sheraton, could ever dream to – had the crowd's attention clutched tightly in his palm for all of Polish Club's 75-minute set.

The way Novak and Cunningham gelled with their dual-axe attack was simply marvellous, bouncing off each other's notes and trading solos with the ardour of brothers. And of course, we'd be remiss not to praise the one-of-a-kind chemistry between Novak and drummer John-Henry Pajak, who at times make the set feel more like a musical comedy act. This was best exemplified by the new cut 'Boys On Vacation', a stomping Thin Lizzy pastiche that fiercely hit out at our piss-poor excuse for a Prime Minister.

NOW ALL POLISH CLUB NEEDS TO DO IS BRING A SECOND KICK-DRUM, SWAP THE GRETSCH OUT FOR AN IBANEZ, AND LET SHIT TRULY HIT THE FAN

It was also then in the set, though, that Polish Club's tightness seemed to unravel. A schlocky cover of Werner Thomas' 'Chicken Dance' felt painfully forced, and a '70s hard-rock reimagining of 'Come Party' – one of the biggest highlights from the duo's full-length debut, *Alright Already* – was almost impressively messy. 'No Heaven' also fell rather flat as the set's closer, with plenty of other cuts in the Polish Club echelon – 'Moonlighting', 'Broke', 'We Don't Care' and 'Able', to name just a few – much better suited for the honour.

On the note of slow jams, one set-saving moment in the latter half was their *Like A Version* cover of Doja Cat's 'Say So', flipped into a sexy, sauntering slow-burn replete with a gloriously over-the-top solo. That, bleeding smoothly into an improvised jam section, went on for an impressive stretch of time – we want to say maybe four or five minutes – and honestly, they could've gone for another two or three more.

Aside from their few errant hiccups, Polish Club put on a very solid, thoroughly enjoyable show – par for the course, really. Now all they need to do is bring in a second kick-drum, swap the Gretsch out for an Ibanez, and let shit truly hit the fan for the *Now We're Cookin' In Hell* touring cycle. That record, by the way, lands on June 10th via Dew Process. May Novak and JH have mercy on our souls. ag

LOVE AND THUNDER

FOR HER STRIKING AND CINEMATIC SOLO DEBUT, **HANNAH CROFTS** MAKES HEARTBREAK FEEL POWERFUL. GUYS, GALS AND NON-BINARY PALS, MEET BABY VELVET.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **MICHELLE GRACE HUNDER**.

Glossy pop songs about love and heartbreak may not be as chic as they once were, but under her new pseudonym of Baby Velvet, the inimitable Hannah Crofts (who you may know better as the bubbly uke maestro in All Our Exes Live In Texas) aims to make them an essential part of your daily playlist. Her debut album, *Please Don't Be In Love With Someone Else*, is so enrapturing, catchy and charismatic that even if you look like the biggest dork on Earth when you sing along to it (and trust us, you will), it's impossible not succumb to its allure.

Perhaps most striking is the album's sonic breadth: every track is an opulent eruption of widescreen indie-pop, with towering stacks of soaring vocal harmonies, warbling guitars and shimmery atmospherics. Glimmers of surf-rock and psych-pop are twisted through a lens of unrestrained theatricality

Especially given it origins, *Please Don't Be In Love With Someone Else* is a notably impressive effort: not only is it Crofts' first record as a solo artist, but it was a largely DIY affair, pieced together from stems tracked in Crofts' bedroom with LA-based producer Kevin Ratterman working remotely. Crofts also didn't play the guitar before she started writing songs for the record – after she picked up her first proper axe in the early days of Baby Velvet's genesis, she'd take a lesson, latch onto a new technique, then practice that technique by writing a song around it.

Australian Guitar sat down with Crofts to learn more about her on-the-fly style of fretwork, how such lowkey production birthed such a grandiose listen, and what makes the character of Baby Velvet herself "the punk version" of Crofts.

The record is finally here! How does it feel to be unleashing this beast into the wild?

It feels weird, because I made this entire record in my bedroom. I wrote it all in lockdown, and then when I recorded it with Kevin [Ratterman], my producer, he was in Los Angeles and I was supposed to be there to do it with him, but that couldn't happen because of COVID, so I just bought all the gear and recorded myself. I just sent him all the stems and we made it that way. Even last year, so much of it was done in lockdown – I was in my pyjamas when I put 'Call Me' out [*laughs*]. In these last two months, I finally started to do shows again, and it's feeling like, "Oh yeah, this is what being a musician is! I have to wear normal clothes again!"

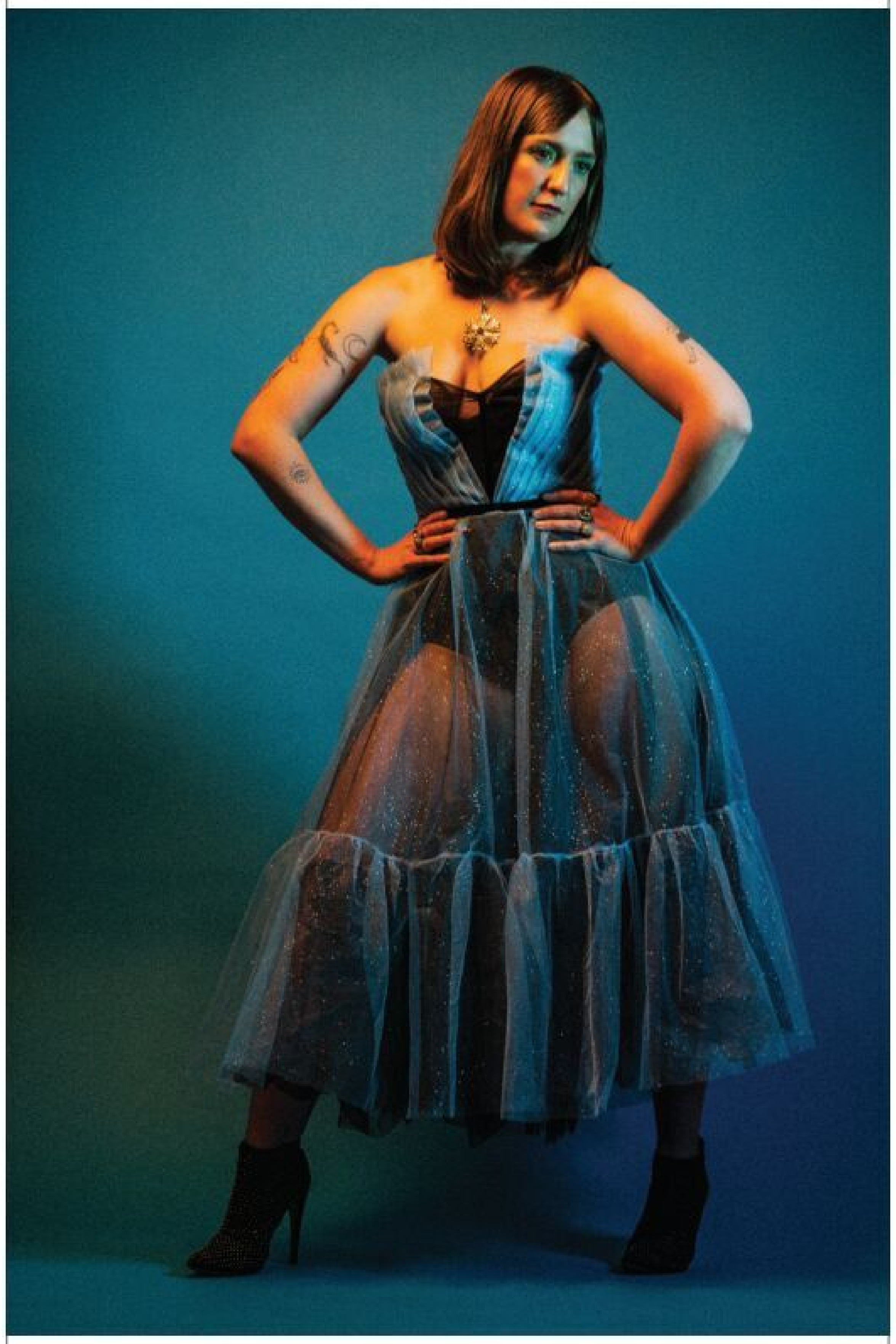
It's wild to me that you made this whole record in your bedroom – it's so colourful and dynamic, with all of these huge, widescreen harmonies and layered guitars. Was that sense of grandeur something you were keen to embrace?

Yes! I picked Kevin as my producer because he made most of Ray LaMontagne's records – and worked a lot with Jenny O, who I'm obsessed with – and I just love the guitar sounds that he can get. He also really knows the deep love of harmonies that I have. I find him very Los Angeles – it's very surf-rocky, and even though I'm not a surf-rocker, I wanted that sense of spaciousness. This is really stupid, but I feel like I want [this record] to be the soundtrack for the last scene in *Little Miss Sunshine*, when they're driving their car across the interstate and it's all big and dynamic. That's kind of what I had in my brain, and that's why Kevin was so good for it.

So what's the origin story for Baby Velvet? Where did the idea for this project come from?

I've played in All Our Exes Live In Texas for ten years, and we've always worked super collaboratively. It's been great – every decision we've ever made has been made between the four of us, musically and stylistically – but when the pandemic hit, it felt like the perfect time for us to go, "Just do whatever you want." And so Baby Velvet kind of came from going, "Okay, I'm not touring with Exes, I haven't been for the last two years, this is my opportunity write the record that I've always wanted to write."

The name comes from my goddaughter, Velvet.



She's three, and I swear, you've never met a leader as fearless as Velvet. She's kind of like a little punk chick – she's got a shaved head, she's got the energy of a rugby player... If she falls over and scrapes her knee, she just gets up and starts running again. Her mum said that she really wanted to raise her so that she never has anxiety. And that's such a beautiful idea – that this kid is never anxious or nervous about stuff – and I want that to come across in Baby Velvet. It's like the drag version of myself – it's this version of me that's fearless, ready to fall over and fight. It's the punk version of me.

As songwriter, how did you find that this record really pushed your artistry to new heights?

Well I play ukulele in All Our Exes, and that kind of happened out of necessity. We got booked for our first show, and none of us could play any instruments – Elana [Stone] could play accordion, but we literally went to the shop and bought instruments, then played them for our first gig, and then continued that. So it's never been my dream to play ukulele in a band, and it wasn't something that I necessarily made a conscious decision about – but for this project, I knew that I really wanted to play guitar.

I couldn't really play the guitar three years ago, but I'd always dreamt of doing so, so I bought a guitar and had some lessons, and then I'd write songs around that. If you only know how to do one thing on one instrument, then your songs will keep sounding the same. But then if you have lessons and you learn new techniques, then you can base your new songs around the new things that you learn.

So you'd learn a new technique, then practice it by writing a song with that at the forefront?

Yeah, there was heaps of that, which was great. It was a really nice way to write the songs that I'd been wanting to write for a while, but never had the skills or techniques to actually do. And I'm still learning, but it's a gratifying process. When I'm playing the ukulele in Exes, I just strum along like *"chung, chung, chung"* the whole time, and so I think my time and my ability to comp are quite good. That was easy to translate to the guitar, but then doing anything other than that – any kind of lead parts or melodies – that's been the hardest part. That's the part I'm still learning, but it's also the most fun.

Do you still play with your Tele and your acoustic parlour?

Yeah! I got a Maton parlour the other day. It's beautiful. I have a little Kay parlour as well, but the Kay has a baseball bat-sized neck – it's like a little hybrid – so it's fun to play, but barre chords are extremely painful. So I got a beautiful Maton to help with that.

What were some of the staples on your pedalboard for this record?

I'm not very cool in the gear world, but it's basically a distortion, a reverb and my tuner. I have a lead guitarist in my band, Brian, and when I'm playing the songs live, we try to recreate the parts on the album where I'm doing a lot of the ambient chord comping. I just want that to sound big and open and lush – and that process, for me, is the easiest way to get that sound. And then Brian can do all the fun little noodly bits throughout it.

Did you play everything on the record?

I did a lot of the guitar and all of the singing, and then Kevin did some of the extra slide guitar bits, the drums and the bass. It was an awesome dynamic because I'd be like, "I can't do that bit," and he'd be like, "No sweat, I can do it!" And then he'd be like, "Now I can't do this, you do it!"

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF BALL PARK MUSIC

WITH TOURING OFF THE CARDS FOR THEIR SIXTH ALBUM, **BALL PARK MUSIC** LOOKED TO LP7 AS A YEARLONG EFFORT TO CHISEL OUT A TRUE MASTERPIECE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **THOMAS CALDER**.

There's a great many reasons to love Ball Park Music, not the least of which being their shit-hot indie-rock. Another is their consistency: without fail, you can expect a new record from the Brissy-native quintet every two years. It's a tradition they've kept alive for a flat decade now, the only exception being their 2012 sophomore effort, *Museum* (which came just over a year after *Happiness And Surrounding Suburbs*). Without the chance to tour their self-titled 2020 album, the band had a wealth of extra time to work on this year's album.

So in a first for the band, Ball Park Music spent the entirety of 2021 slowly chipping away at a record, moving into a brand new studio – "a little timber cottage in The Valley, which was once part of Brisbane's first Italian restaurant, Mama Luigi's" – and making LP7 their full-time bread and butter. As frontman Sam Cromack explained in announcing the album, "This is probably the most time we've spent all together, day-in and day-out, just making music together. We really threw it all at the wall for this one."

The end result is *Weirder & Weirder*, an aptly titled effort for the times it was conceptualised, tracked and released in. Before Ball Park Music embark on a lofty national tour in support of it, we caught up with Cromack and rhythm guitarist Dean Hanson to go behind the scenes on *Weirder & Weirder*.

What was that experience like, being able to really take your time with this record and let the ideas bloom more naturally?

Cromack: I think some of it came out of necessity. Even though we've always worked pretty quickly and managed to churn out a record every two years, it sort of felt like we'd started this one a bit prematurely. A lot of it had to do with the nature of COVID – Jen wasn't living in Brisbane when we started, but she had to come up here to do some shows, and then she got stuck up here with all the border bullshit. So we said, "Well, we've got a few songs kicking around, and we've got this space to work in – why don't we just start messing around and see what happens?"

So we began in earnest and did a few songs, and we were having fun with it at first, but then we fully hit... I don't know if I'd call it a 'roadblock', but around the halfway point, we were like, "Hold on, what are we doing? Do we even have enough songs to finish this record?" It was the first time we'd been writing and recording an album at the same time; we've always gone into recording with everything more or less completely written, but this one was a lot more oped-ended.

The opening track, 'Manny', was made in a really spontaneous and collaborative way – much more collaborative than any song we'd done the past. I usually come in and will be like, "Here's a song!" But with this one, it was more like, "Here's a riff – what can we do with it?" We had moments like that [with this record] – it was much more flexible.

Did you find that certain songs world evolve quite expansively over time?

Cromack: Absolutely, yeah. We did three or four versions of some songs, and some of them went through massive reinventions. There was one song that we even performed live, and then later on we were like, "Nah, it's not right," and we ended up massively remaking it – and that became our latest single, 'Stars In My Eyes'.

Hanson: It was funny – I made a post on Instagram about the record coming out, and a guy replied, like, "Hey, did you change the name of this song? Because I remember you guys played it live, and it was really sick." And I was just like, "Man, that's the same song, it's just completely different now."

Do you think some of those more "out-there" demos could find a second life in the future?

Cromack: Yeah, we've talked about putting some of them out. There's a bigger and bigger pile of demos growing all the time. We're definitely not opposed to doing a compilation of them, or something like that – we just haven't found the time or the energy to make it happen. But yeah, it's always fun going back to those early versions.

In having so much time to experiment with these songs, did "Weirder & Weirder" become somewhat of a mantra for the process?

Cromack: I think the record was essentially done when we chose that title. It's been a long time since we've embarked on a record with a title set out from the beginning. Typically we finish the record, and then we're like, "F***, what should we call it!?" We've also never had a title track before – we've had songs with a title that we like and think would be worthy of an album title, but then we'd start thinking, "Will this draw too much attention to that particular song? Maybe that song's not worthy of the scrutiny." But clearly, we didn't feel that way this time.

And yeah, it's funny, I do wonder if people will think, "Oh, is this album going to be super duper weird?" I don't know if it is, but I do think we're always trying to push the limit and experiment. But it definitely wasn't a mantra to begin with – I think it has more to do with the times and how we all feel, not just because of COVID, but generally too, getting older and feeling weirder and weirder in your own head.

As guitarists, what were some of the techniques and styles you were keen to explore on this record?

Cromack: I think we always try to at least get a few new guitars in the room – I'm sure you know as well as we do, a new instrument can provide all the inspiration that you need. Dean had a new Strat, which was beautiful, and I borrowed a friend's 12-string Danelectro – which I've now bought off him because I loved it that much – so there were some new instruments in the mix, and that always inspires the playing. But Dean and I think a little bit more outside of the frame when we're making music – I think we see ourselves as producers and songwriters first and foremost, as opposed to guitarists.

Hanson: The way we made this record – and a lot of stuff we've been working on in the last couple of years – was a lot of just sitting and jamming the song together, without talking about parts or considering how they worked in the song. We just kind of find where we sit in the song, and let it go from there. A lot of other guitarists might be really particular about what their part is, and focus a lot more on perfecting it and learning it by heart. But we just go with whatever feels right at any given moment. I think that just comes naturally after performing with someone for such a long time.

So when you play these songs live, do take on a different colour or personality?

Cromack: Yeah, I think it's early days for these songs, but our general attitude towards performing live has shifted much more towards that. There was definitely a phase – I think around the time we put out our third record, *Puddinghead* – where I was much more obsessed with the performance, having all the elements of a song be extremely true to the recorded version. But as we've gotten older, we chucked that ethos in the bin and realised that when we play a song live, it can be whatever it needs to be. And that feels really liberating. It's just about listening to the band and being like, "Okay, what does this song need to kick ass when we play it live?" ag

SHOCK AND AWE

WITH A RENEWED SENSE OF CLARITY AND AMPLIFIED CONFIDENCE, **BODY TYPE** ARE READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD, ARMED WITH AN EXPLOSIVELY ENRAPTURING DEBUT ALBUM.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA.** PHOTO BY **ELLEN VIRGONA**.

Before the pandemic hit, Body Type were en route to hit indie-rock superstardom not just in Australia, but in every continent they could step foot. They formed in 2016 at the very onset of their musical journeys: singer Sophie McComish had only just started learning guitar, and drummer Cecil Coleman could hardly keep a beat, but unfaltering enthusiasm brought them together for a handful of casual jams. Via mutual friends came McComish's counterpart, fellow singer-strummer Annabel Blackman, and bass queen Georgia Wilkinson-Derums – and by the time they'd chiseled out the tracings of a signature sound, they'd already won over the world.

Punctuated by two EPs – simply branded *EP1* and *EP2* – Body Type's early years were defined by gigs at SXSW in the States and the Great Escape festival in the UK, as well as sold-out headliners everywhere from LA to London. They scored approval from the likes of Big Thief, Cate Le Bon, Fontaines D.C. and Unknown Mortal Orchestra.

But in their greenness, Body Type got swept up in a scene that didn't quite define them; industry vultures swooped in to take control, and soon the path they were on had snaked far from their ambitions. Thankfully, as much became apparent before the band started working on their debut album. Keen to regain control, they snipped the strings that had them tied to "the industry", funded studio sessions entirely themselves, and set out to make their debut a fully DIY affair. "We were coming out of a period that felt quite suffocating and restrictive," McComish explained. "We just kind of regrouped and re-energised and did it ourselves."

The end result, *Everything Is Dangerous But Nothing's Surprising* is a fierce – and fiercely confident – walloping of heart-on-sleeve punk. It shows that Body Type aren't just here to stay – they're here to slay. We caught up with McComish to riff on just how they brought the album to life.

You recorded this album in early 2020. Have you seen the last two years as an opportunity to sort of mellow out and catch your breath, or is there another album in the wings?

A little bit of both, kind of. There's definitely another album's worth of material, but our bass player, Georgia [Wilkinson-Derums], ended up in WA just before the pandemic struck, and then couldn't get back over here for the longest time. So we've got about 20 new songs that she needs to write her parts for – but once that's all done, I reckon we'll get back into the studio pretty quickly.

Those two EPs are obviously crucial to the Body Type echelon, but for a lot of people, this will be their introduction to the band. With that in mind, how did you want this record to really encapsulate what Body Type is and means?

I feel like with the EPs, we were kind of learning how to be a band. Because we all came into this project not really knowing what the f*** we were doing – none of us could really play our instruments, and we were all just sort of learning how to do the whole 'band thing' together. So the EPs, for me, represent us learning how to make noise and learning how to work as a band, and then this album symbolises us really coming into our own and making the noise that we want to be making. I think it's a more accurate portrayal of what we're about and where we're going, both sonically and thematically.

In the press release, you explained that in the early days of this album's production, Body Type was "coming out of a period that felt quite suffocating and restrictive". How did you reckon with that feeling of being held back before you'd even done your debut album?

It was really hard. It was a really confusing period, because you can't help but get swept up in all this cool, exciting stuff that's happening, and people come onboard to help you shape where you're going with your project. And we just got so swept up in that, I think we've kind of lost track of our own confidence, and our own ability to recognise what we wanted to be doing and how we wanted do it. So after a while, we were like, "Wait a second, we've kind of deviated from the path that we wanted to go down for ourselves here – let's just bring it back to us for a bit." And then we started making our own decisions again, and we were like, "Hmm... Actually, we want to record this album now. And we're gonna do it here. And this is how we're gonna do it..." And then we did it, and it felt really good!

So in endeavouring to capture that restless excitement, how quickly did the record come together?

One of the songs on the record is one of the first songs I ever wrote – so it's kind of been brewing, technically, for more than five years. But we went on a little writing retreat in the Margaret River at the end of 2019. That was a really massive year for us – we went overseas for the first time, played South By Southwest, then went to the UK, which was just so crazy. We were just on fire after that, so went on this retreat and honed in on about 15 songs. We got into the studio in February of 2020, I think. We were there with our friend Jono Boulet, who recorded it for us, and we were probably in there for about eight days – we got everything we needed, and then it was all mixed and mastered within a month or two after that. So it was pretty quick once we actually got in there.

I feel like it would feel disingenuous to write about this record and refer to one of you as Body Type's frontwoman – you all bring so much to this record, and you can really hear the chemistry between the four of you. What's that creative dynamic like?

I live with Annabelle [Blackman, vocals/guitar], so she's very deeply embedded in everything I do in my life. We're very lucky, we have a very fluid way of writing together. All of us do. It maybe took us a while to get to that point, but I feel like letting go, and trusting these women that I'm making music with, is one of the biggest lessons I've learned from this band. Because when we first started and didn't really know what we were doing, it was nerve-racking. But we still write the same way, where one person will bring the bones of a song idea – usually the lyrics and the chord progression – and then everyone else would just build on top of that. And that's such a cool thing, to have found these three women that you can just trust to be like, "Whatever you're gonna do with your bass playing here, or whatever drums you're going to put in here, I know it's going to make song complete." I feel very lucky to have fallen into this group.

What kind of guitars were you shredding out on for this record?

I think it was probably my Strat, but I've recently gone back to playing on the first proper guitar I ever bought, which is a J Mascis Squier. That was my very first electric guitar, aside from this little piece-of-shit Danelectro, which was made of plastic or something. But Annabelle got a really cool guitar that she recorded on for this record. It's a Reverend – I can't remember the model, but it was a gift from a label that we worked with for a while; apparently one of the touring guitarists in Sleater-Kinney played it on something. So all of her parts were recorded on that, and that was pretty special. ag

THE (LIVING) END IS JUST THE BEGINNING

ON HIS LONG-AWAITED SOLO DEBUT, **THE LIVING END**'S **CHRIS CHENEY** HEADS IN A RAWER AND MORE INTIMATE DIRECTION.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **NICK MCKINLAY**.

Though he's best known for his role as a rollicking, larger-than-life rockstar in The Living End, Chris Cheney is much more than those big punk-pop hooks and rockabilly swagger. Never has that been more clear than on his debut solo album, *The Storm Before The Calm* – a sprawling, soul-baring affair that paints Cheney as more of a lowkey singer-songwriter than a mosh-starved rock dog eager to get fists pumping. It explores a lighter side of his musicality – dabbling in folk, blues, country and Americana – with a more ardent focus on the poetic, rather than the punchy. More than anything, it's a poignant deep-dive into Cheney's psyche, tackling themes of mental health, substance abuse, the loss of his father, and marital woes.

Australian Guitar caught up with Cheney to riff on how *The Storm Before The Calm* was brought to life over a whirlwind six-year period, how it took the rocker out of his comfort zone in more ways than one, and why "the Nashville dream" could be more accurately described as a nightmare.

I have to admit, I was kind of surprised when I realised this was going to be your first non-Living End record. How long have you been mulling over the idea of a solo project?

Probably about ten years – ever since I did the 'Distant Sun' cover for the Finn Brothers tribute [*He Will Have His Way*]. It was just me and a Telecaster, and I thought, "Wow, I'd love to do more of that." Because I think I'd always hidden behind the big kind of rock 'n' roll image of The Living End – we're such a visually full-on band, so this idea of stripping all of that away, and just singing – not even focusing on the guitar, but just *singing* – was something that I'd never thought could be at the forefront. But it very much is on this record.

So the idea came about ten years ago, and then for the last five or six years, I've been dabbling in various songwriting sessions, just myself and a piano. It was in 2016 that I went into the studio in Nashville to put down the first songs for this record.

I know you've always been into country, Americana and classic rock, but you're typically seen as a punk-rocker. Was there a different vibe in this record's songwriting process?

No, not really. There is this stereotype that when people see The Living End, they see this all-guns-blazing, big rock 'n' roll band – and we are that, but we've always had songs with acoustic guitars and pianos and strings, too, even as far back as *Roll On*. So it's nothing *new* to me. I've always written different sorts of tunes, but I think the difference was that with this record, I was writing more specifically. It's more personal, I suppose – I've never been this personal in The Living End. There's a lot of the personal demons I'm fighting with on this record, and a lot of really sensitive topics.

Sometimes I would be like, "Ah, do I really want to say that?" But whenever I would think that, I'd listen back to something and it would make me cringe a bit, but I'd be like, "Shit, that's the best part!" A lot of those moments that I was like, "I don't know about this, this might be opening up the wound too much," they ended up being the strongest parts. It was just undeniable, in the end, that those songs had to make the record.

Was there a balance you wanted to strike, where the songs could be poignant but not *too* intense?

Yeah, there was. And that's why, when I moved back here from Los Angeles at the beginning of 2020, I kept working on the record. I had the Nashville record in the can, but it was so dark and so difficult to listen to, I always felt like, "Gee, it'd be great if there were a couple more songs on here." So when I got back here and we went into lockdown, I just kept writing more songs. I ended up with three or four more that ended up balancing out the record, and taking a bit of that edge off.

I really felt like I was living the Nashville… I wouldn't even say 'dream' – it was a nightmare! It was like this personal meltdown that I was going through – there was a whole lot of stuff going on in my life at that point, and it all came to a head *while* I was in Nashville, making this record. And it was almost like I was creating the soundtrack to what was going on in my life.

I didn't necessarily want to make a country record, but it definitely had those Americana and country influences – which have always been within me, but again, had never been at the forefront. So when I got back here, I wrote 'California', 'Corner Shop' and 'Little White Pills', and those songs felt a bit more rockin' and a bit more upbeat. And then I was like, "Okay, *now* the record is finished." I'm really glad the record didn't come out as it was. There's about half of the Nashville tracks on there, and then the other half is from Los Angeles and Melbourne.

So now, being on the other side of that journey, how do you look at the record? Is it marred by the darkness that defined its origin, or is it liberating to see all of the progress you'd made between where you started and where you are now?

It's absolutely liberating. Even the darkest songs, I'm proud of the way I allowed myself to wrestle with them. I sort of lifted the veil, I suppose, and I didn't try to sugarcoat anything skirt around my issues. It's really quite confronting. I think there's a depth, as a songwriter, that you always want to achieve – you want your songs to be organic and earthy and real, and you want people to be able to connect with them – and you only get that by wearing your heart on your sleeve.

But nobody wants to hear a dark, depressing record, so even though I was going through something really heavy, I think there's stuff on there that people can relate to – it's not the kind of record where you'll want to slit your wrists when you hear it. You're just hearing a different side to me. I think most people have gone, "Oh, I didn't know he could do that! I thought he was just the guitar guy with the rousing choruses!" So I'm proud that I've been able to strip everything back to just the bare bones. And it still delivers! It's still powerful.

Having started with the lyrics on every track, did that lead you to experiment more when it came time to find the right sounds to accompany them?

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, everything always starts on an acoustic guitar – I very rarely write plugged into an amp or anything like that… Except for 'California', when I had the capo on and I was just playing around with that opening riff, having the open strings ring out, trying to channel some sort of Tom Petty-ish idea. But everything else was very acoustic.

I should say, though: there was another guitarist that played in the band in Nashville, Jeremy Fetzer. He added some really nice little flourishes to things, and I was quite happy to do that. I remember, I had a friend in LA that went, "Dude, you've got another guitar player on your record!? Shouldn't *you* be doing all the guitars!?" And I was like, "No!" I was really happy to have Jeremy there, because I *wanted* it to have a different flavour. I wanted it to not necessarily sound like me. The idea was that I had this band, and they played really well together, so then I could just walk in as a singer. ag

SATCH ON MARS

18 SOLO ALBUMS DOWN, **JOE SATRIANI**'S MIND-BENDING MUSICALITY CONTINUES TO EVOLVE. ON *THE ELEPHANTS OF MARS*, HE REACHES NEW HEIGHTS OF NARRATIVE INTENSITY.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.
PHOTO BY **JEN ROSENSTEIN**.

Few musos have mastered the art of instrumental rock as dextrously as Joe Satriani. Satriani's instrumental records are largely driven by poetry; he uses a broad palette of tones to paint spacious and vastly populated soundscapes, each serving to frame a story told through a language based on musical passages. A grisly, overdriven solo can portray a sense of doom, for example, each thundering note representing an actual jolt of thunder.

On the track 'Faceless', for example, Satriani explores themes of loneliness – "when the person you want to see you for who you really are doesn't seem to recognise you" – where its cathartic solo "represents one's true self finally breaking free". It's track three on Satriani's 18th solo album, *The Elephants Of Mars*, which the Westbury, New York-native shredder said could be considered the "new standard" by which instrumental albums should be judged. It comes from his intention to establish "a new platform of [Satriani's] own design".

Australian Guitar cornered Satch to chat more about his ambitious vision for *The Elephants Of Mars*.

18 albums in, how do you keep it all feeling fresh and exciting? Are there still barriers you want to break and goals you want to kick?

All the barriers I want to break are my own. I'm still a struggling guitarist. It's still hard to play guitar – I still have to slow down every day and go, "What is wrong with this finger? Has it forgotten its purpose in life!?" I've never felt like I'm as physically gifted as some of my really good buddies, so I work extra hard for that sort of dexterity. But the writing is what I love the most – and that really depends on my ability to be truthful and honest with myself. It's really hard to just bare your soul to whatever recording medium you're working with, and then share it with people. It takes a weird kind of discipline, and you can't let up. You have to make it your way life. You really have to decide, "I'm going to do this, so I better get used to it."

It's like when a priest takes that oath, right? You're dedicating yourself to the culture and the craft.

It's true! When I was just a teenager, I remember taking lessons from Lennie Tristano, and he was trying to get me to understand that to be a musician meant living a very serious life. He used to say things like, "There are no vacations for musicians." You never think in the subjunctive – you never think you should have, you could have, you would have – you just *be*. You learn everything there is to learn, you don't kid yourself, and then when you play, you give no judgement. They were basically Zen lessons, and they were impossible to master. But you take them on as life quests, I suppose. And at the end of the night, it's still rock 'n' roll, and I still want to have fun onstage with my guitar – so it's all filtered through who I am, and what I like to do, and how I like to share my music with people.

How do you tell a story with just your guitar and that tonal landscape?

It's important to really identify with the subject matter, and to make a decision that you're going to recognise and eliminate any techniques that don't belong, or that aren't going to support a unique story for a particular song. I think for rock guitar players, there's always that danger that your audience may mistake a certain part for a solo because it's got too many notes in it. And that's our own fault, y'know, because we like to play!

The electric guitar is always seen as occupying that space in the band – when you want things to go crazy, you let the guitar player go crazy, y'know? He's not the guy in the band that you depend on to explain the song. So as an instrumentalist, I have to reorient my tools to make sure that when I'm playing a melody, I'm always putting it in the simplest terms. I play as few notes as possible, and I have to edit and edit and edit, and then figure out a way to listen back and go, "Okay, I'm a normal person listening to this – does this part have too many notes?"

Especially having recorded all of these new songs remotely, how much did they evolve over time?

This record has so many different versions of me accomplishing the track. Somebody else asked me about my method, and I went, "I don't have a method!" I always just go with what's working, you know? Like, the last song on the album, 'Desolation' – that was a little two-minute piece that Eric [Caudieux, engineer] really wanted to expand and make into a full song. But when he finally sent it to me, it was 22 minutes long – it had this long introduction, then my piece in the middle, then this three-minute improv of an orchestra. And I listened to it for months before I realised we needed to get rid of the first part, get rid of the second part – even though I wrote it – and just keep that last part. Because it was saying something to me – I just didn't know what it was.

But that's so entirely different from the first song on the record, 'Sahara', where I came into the studio with a feeling and a person in my mind, and a particular set of lyrics, and it all came at once, and I recorded that whole song in a few hours. The only real big misstep with that was that I wrote the lyrics for Ray to sing, and then somehow that never got done so we turned it into an instrumental.

As far as the recording goes, this was the first time you did everything using plugins, wasn't it?

Yeah – *a* plugin, actually! I usually record DI anyway, just so we can reamp the sessions later, and I've done that for over 20 years – we take the DI track off the session, we use John Cuniberti's reamp, and we send it back out into the Marshalls, the Peaveys and the Fenders, and it always works great. But this time around, we had all those tracks side by side, we would A-B them, and it was always like, "Wow, what's *that* one? Oh, it's the SansAmp! That can't be right, did you mislabel that? That's gotta be the Marshall..." But as it turned out, down to the very last song, the only amp I used was the SansAmp plugin, that old AVID plugin from the '90s.

It just didn't interfere with or homogenise me. And that's the thing: it always sounded more like me than any other version we got from all the great modelling suites they've got out there, or from reamping with the Boss Waza amp or the reamp device. I couldn't understand it myself, I was really shocked. The first thing I did was call the guys at IK Multimedia and say, "Sorry!" But they were cool with it, because y'know, when they approached me about doing the AmpliTube 5 suite, it was to celebrate my old sounds. So they went, "Well, that's okay – that [suite] celebrates your older tones, and we love it, and people love it, so we're going to keep selling it, and you can still be associated with it, even though you're playing this old plugin."

So when you play these songs live, are you going through a digital rig?

No, I'll use my Marshall JVM410HJS – that thing sounds amazing. It's got so many tones in it. The important thing is how it reacts to my guitar's volume control – y'know, I can take a sound that you think might be a germanium distortion box, put it through a loud Marshall, pop up my high-pass filter and tweak the volume knob just a little bit, and suddenly you go, "Wow, it sounds like an AC30!" It's amazing how [the JVM410HJS] reacts to simple guitar controls. That's what I've always loved about it. You've got to get it up pretty loud, though – once it gets to be around 112 decibels, it's really something beautiful.

INTO THE DARKNESS

AFTER TWO YEARS SPENT DESCENDING INTO INSANITY, **PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS** HAVE CONJURED UP THEIR DARKEST AND WEIRDEST – AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, BEST – ALBUM YET.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **TRISTAN MCKENZIE**.

By the time Psychedelic Porn Crumpets dropped their fourth studio album, *SHYGA! The Sunlight Mound*, the world had well and truly turned to shit. It was February '21, and with new variants of COVID-19 emerging, more lockdowns looming, and a return to the good ol' days of live music looking farther out of reach by the hour, dark and stormy, angst-driven rock was the new bubblegum pop. It came as no surprise, then, that *SHYGA!* hit the ARIA Top 5 – a huge leap up from the #31 debut of its predecessor, *And Now For The Whatchamacallit*.

The band themselves were expectedly stoked by LP4's success, but they were also on the brink of insanity. A punitive cocktail of anxiety, uncertainty and boredom pushed frontman Jack McEwan right to the edge, and so while *SHYGA!* toyed with heaviness, its follow-up was inevitably going to plumb the deepest depths of true bleakness. And though tracks like 'Bubblegum Infinity' and 'Acid Dent' paint the picture of a bright and buoyant psych-pop album primed for festival mainstages, beneath the surface, *Night Gnomes* is a gut-punching journey into the darkest corners of McEwan's psyche.

Australian Guitar got down to the wire with the singer, guitarist, producer and programmer to peer behind the curtain at the new record's genesis.

The last time you had a gap between releases be this short, it was between Parts 1 and 2 of *High Visceral*. On that note, does Night Gnomes feel like a direct successor to *SHYGA!*?

Kind of. I think there were a lot of the same ideas being thrown around, and going from house to house back then, *SHYGA!* and *Night Gnomes* were both recorded in the same sort of environment. But I do think they're two separate records because I wanted to keep the writing styles a little different. 'Bob Holiday' could have fit on *SHYGA!*, I think – that was like something I wrote afterwards, but in the same sort of mindset I had when I was writing that album.

So after *SHYGA!* came out, when it became evident that things weren't going back to normal anytime soon, did it take a while for that creative motivation to creep back in, or were you just teeming with ideas from the get-go?

I don't think there was a period where I didn't feel like writing – most days I'd wake up in the morning, write a couple of ideas, and then I'd be like, "Okay, which one should I record?" But then with a lot of them, I'd make it to Friday after working on three or four songs, and I'd just be like, "God, these are all so bad!" Maybe there'd be one good idea out of month's worth. But y'know, you feel great sometimes and you feel shit sometimes, and you just have to keep working it out. I think the hardest part was just being like, "What material fits best together?" Because there were bits and pieces that sounded like metal, and then some sort of weird, jazzy nu-metal stuff... It didn't sound like Limp Bizkit, but it also didn't not sound like Limp Bizkit [laughs].

You've described this record as being "a bit darker than the other four releases". Where did that darkness come from?

Probably being stuck inside like everyone else. The pub was shut and we couldn't leave the house to hang out anywhere else. I hadn't been home in a long time – and I think that was the same thing with *SHYGA!*, but that album was the happy aspect of being like, "What have I missed out on? What's going

on?" With this one, I think it slowly dawned on me, like, "Oh, we're not leaving home for a long time. Maybe this is the end of our career, maybe we're never going to go on tour again or play another show. Maybe we'll all just be postmen." I think it came from that, going from being on top of the world to feeling like it had all ended.

I think the idea of a 'night gnome' is something that kind of eats away at your brain and is always terrorising you – it's like a bad trip, I suppose. I think that dread turned into a bit of angst, and then we put that to the heavier stuff, like 'Lava Lamp Pisco'. And then there were other bits and pieces where we sort of found the beauty in it and made some stuff that sounded a bit more swanky.

So what was the process with this one? Was the writing a little more splintered than it might usually be?

I was writing a lot of it and finishing the record at home, and then I showed Rish and Danny a few of the songs that I had, and they were like, "Cool." There wasn't really any talk of collaboration – it was more like, "What songs fit on the album? We'll do those in the studio." But for some reason, that rush aspect of what a record is, even though we had so much time to work on it, we still used the guitar [parts] that I had demoed here. I remember, we were talking to Sam Ford at Tone City, who did all of the guitars, and he was like, "Man, I can't wait to get my hands on these parts!" And I was like, "*You leave them alone!*"

I got really personal about it, like, "This is my little baby project that we need to see cross the line." It's been about a year since we finished it – we had to wait for the vinyl manufacturing to catch up with the rest of the world – so I've had a bit of time to think about it. And I mean, there's loads of bits where I'm like, "Ah, if we just did this, or tweaked that and did this, or maybe cut down some of the high-end on that track..." But I think it's all part of the learning curve – I've never had an album come out and not been working on the next one, so it's nice to sort of think, like, "Alright, let's see what works this time, and then write a record that pays attention to that."

What guitars were you tearing it up on for this record?

I have a Jazzmaster tuned to standard D, and then a Jazzmaster turned to standard E, and I sort of bounce around between them. I've got this little Mustang bass as well, but a lot of it was just done on an acoustic. I've found that I like tuning that down, usually to standard C, where the strings sound a lot more dark and bitey, and have more depth. I found that a lot easier to write on, because you can hear [the notes] better on the acoustic.

What is it about the Jazzy that just makes your heart skip a beat?

I don't know, it just seems so versatile. There's not too many things that you can't do with it. I remember trying lots of guitars, and it was between that and a Madsen. But the Jazzmaster just had such a round body to it. I was using an Ibanez for ages – it had skulls all over it, I'd bought off a friend who was like, "Alright, this is only meant for djenting and metal!" But I don't know, I just felt like there were a lot of styles that I liked to play, so it felt right to start off with something that can do most of then, and then try to build up from there once I've got my own style. And I'm still trying to work out what that is – I still don't know what sort of angle to approach it from, but in the meantime, it feels like the Jazzmaster the most accessible. It feels like you're already finished with the song, as soon as you start playing with it.

INSIDE ROLLING BLACKOUTS' CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

STEERED BY THEIR INDIVIDUALITY AND THE "F*** IT" ATTITUDE THAT CAME WITH COVID-INCITED UNCERTAINTY, **ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER** MADE THEIR OWN MUSICAL MULTIVERSE FOR ALBUM #4. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **NICK MCKK**.

With their jaunty and jangly second album, *Sideways To New Italy*, it felt like Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever had struck gold. Though its inopportune timing meant a fractured touring cycle – the record dropped in June of 2020, after all – it was a critical darling, and debuted at #4 on the ARIA Charts. It's clear to see why, too: while it retained the band's loose and lax energy, it felt tight and considered in ways their debut, 2018's *Hope Downs*, didn't. It was a sharply written, summery indie-rock album soaked in good vibes: the kind of release we all needed in that chaotic middle chunk of 2020.

Endless Rooms, by contrast, feels like it was informed by that chaos – it's a little gloomier, more unhinged and psychedelic. 'The Way It Shatters' is sprightly and melodic, but its chord progression feels uneasy – there's something sinister bubbling away under the surface, waiting for the right moment to strike. 'Caught Low', 'Deep Dive' and the title track all play with melancholic passages of poignant pseudo-balladry, chasing more upbeat cuts ('My Echo' and 'Vanishing Dots' for the latter two, respectively) with emotive blows, not unlike the way sudden, drawn-out lockdowns dulled otherwise happy months of 2021.

Too, thanks in no short part to all the extra time they had to work on it, *Endless Rooms* is undoubtedly Rolling Blackouts' most expansive and dynamic album. Each of the 12 tracks feel entirely self-contained, like miniature projects that each stand out on their own merits, independent of their grouping. This was intentional – when they announced it, the band said that *Endless Rooms* would be "almost an anti-concept album", explaining that the title "reflects our love of creating worlds in our songs".

"We treat each of them as a bare room to be built up with infinite possibilities," they continued. And as vocalist, lead guitarist and keyboardist Joe White expounds to *Australian Guitar*, those possibilities were explored with each member of the band working individually, allowing their full creative potential to be tapped before it was brought to the jam room. It's a product of circumstance, White admits, but not in the sense that isolation fractured the band's ethos. Never ones to let a rough time get them down, the band found advantages in their situation, ultimately making *Endless Rooms* a positive reflection of an otherwise tumultuous time.

Where did the idea to create an "anti-concept album" come from?

I guess this record was unique in that we were all writing these songs fairly separately to each other. They were songs that came about as a result of sitting at home, and they were all songs and ideas that weren't necessarily written for Rolling Blackouts. We were all just making songs for the sake of making songs, so we had a lot of different, quite diverse styles coming in. And once we finally got together and we were able to bring these songs into the band, we found that they didn't really sound like the songs you'd hear on a Rolling Blackouts record. We sort of just wrangled all these pieces together to make them playable as a band; a lot of them were made with keys and drum machines and that kind of stuff, so transposing all of that over to the jam room was an interesting experience. It was a very different way of doing things, and I think because of that, all of the songs have their own unique styles.

Writing independently – and not necessarily writing with RBCF in mind – did that lead to some to some more experimental songs coming out?

Yeah, absolutely. That's how we got a lot of these songs. With a song like 'The Way It Shatters', y'know, there's a lot of synthesiser, and that song was all written on keyboards – there wasn't really any guitar involved until the band was brought into it. So yeah, that was definitely liberating – the sounds and styles and approaches that we took, that may never have happened if we weren't writing like that.

As a guitarist, what were some of the new techniques or styles that you explored on this record?

I was at doing a lot of stuff at home. I bought a new microphone, and I was really into messing around with different techniques using that – like putting the mic two metres away and turning the amp up really loud. It just bred some more expensive sounds, I think. We also got our hands on some new pedals – I got this double delay pedal that's got this big wobble in it, and that informed some of the sounds [on this record] as well.

I was also reading about how you'd recorded this album in an old mud-brick house that the Russo family built in the '70s. What was that whole experience like?

That was such a great experience! We'd already been going up to this house for years, just as friends, either for parties or for writing and demoing and all that kind of stuff. This house has been a really awesome, lovely home base for us for a while. We weren't really sure if we're going to be able to record a whole album in the house, but we went up there with our engineer, Matt Duffy, and we did demos and sort of sussed it out. We got some really interesting sounds out of the drums – the room that the drums were in was just a very unique sounding room. And we were able to isolate all the amps into different bedrooms and up in the mezzanine. So in terms of recording, it was great to be able to use this kind of spiritual home that we've been going to for years, and we felt really comfortable there. It was just a good time. It was in the middle of winter, so there was always a big campfire going on outside, and then another fire inside. We ate well, we hung out a bunch... It was fun.

Having that extra freedom, and being somewhere you'd always felt comfortable, was there much improv going on in the sessions?

Not so much in the two weeks that spent at the house, but there always is in the lead-up [to the recording process]. The way we write is that there'll often be an idea that we'll play around with, and we'll just play it on a loop for ten, 20 minutes, maybe hit record on a phone or something, and just try to capture the best bits. Then we'd kind of boil that down, extract all our favorite parts from that ten- or 20-minute jam, and then turn them into parts of the song. So all the jamming [for this record] would have already happened in the lead-up to us heading out to the house.

The record before this one, *Sideways To New Italy*, that was much more of a process where we were trying to not overwrite these songs – we were trying to have them all be these big jams, and then we'd boil those down. But for this record, the songs were brought to the band in a much more fully-formed way. Finishing a song is always the hardest thing – knowing where to end it, where the crescendo is and all that – but a lot of these songs already had the endings built in, just by way of having nothing else to do at home except write songs.

SHREDDING THE PATRIARCHY

ON THEIR SECOND SHOT AT A DEBUT EP, **TEEN JESUS AND THE JEAN TEASERS** PROVE THEY'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO LEAD THE NEXT GENERATION OF AUSTRALIAN ROCK ROYALTY.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **RUBY BOLAND**.

Much more than just a great, family-friendly comedy film with a belting soundtrack, *School Of Rock* stands up as one of the most influential films of the 2000s, thanks in no short part to the innumerable swarm of Gen Z shredders it empowered to chase their dreams. Case in point: Teen Jesus And The Jean Teasers, the trailblazing troupe of Canberran grunge revivalists that formed on a whim after a sleepover screening at frontwoman Anna Ryan's house. It was 2015, the girls were all in their early-to-mid teens, and half of them couldn't even play an instrument. But hell hath no fury like their unwavering ambition, and seven years later, they're ready to take on the world with their sharp, striking and sprightly blend of punk, grunge and power-pop.

The vehicle that Teen Jesus hope will take them there is *Pretty Good For A Girl Band*, a five-track onslaught of fiercely energetic earworms driven by blistering riffs, thrashing drums, and vocal hooks designed to be chanted from the soul. It has the backing of Australian rock royalty in Violent Soho axeman James Tidswell and Alex Lahey, both of whom put their magic touches on the EP as co-writers and producers.

Pretty Good For A Girl Band is technically Teen Jesus' second EP – they dropped a record titled *Creepshow* in 2017, but that's since been scrubbed out of existence. As lead guitarist Scarlett McKahey tells *Australian Guitar*, the new record is better suited as the band's debut: it shows them galvanised by growth, confident in their chemistry and with sights set on what Teen Jesus' perfect future looks like.

How did you want this record to serve as an introduction to what this band really is, and means, and stands for in the 2020s?

We deleted all the songs from the *Creepshow* EP, apart from 'We're All Henry', because I was like 15, 16 when we made that – we were very small, we hadn't found our genre yet, and everything was very up in the air – and I'm so glad we did [that EP], but we definitely didn't know who we were at the time. Now after all these lockdowns, and all this growing – we're all 21 now, and I think between 18 and 21, it's like you grow up the most you ever have – we've really found who we are, we know what we want to sound like and what we want to put forward. So [*Pretty Good For A Girl Band*] is the first thing we've put out where it feels like it's 100 percent, genuinely *us*.

So once you all found your footing, did the new ideas just pour out of you?

I think so. It definitely took a while. It's not like it all just came to us at one point – we've been working hard for the past, like, six years, just like trying to slowly figure out what we want to sound like. We went through a lot of different genres. It's not even so much that we *chose* a genre – I think we're just more in touch with what we want to sound like, and what we want to portray to people. Once you took away all the business of touring and the pressure of deadlines, it was a lot easier to really knuckle down and create something.

What is it that you want to portray?

I think it's a bit of a weird mix – especially with this new single, 'Girl Sports'. All of our past songs were very kind of cute, wholesome bops, but I think now we're just so sick of copping all the bullshit that you'd expect 21-year-old girls in the music industry to cop. So we're trying to have a healthy balance between being like, "Oi, take us seriously, stop treating us like with less than our male colleagues," and, "Please come to the shows and have a nice time, we're here to welcome everyone!"

I think it's hard to find that balance. We really don't want to be super political, because that's not who we are as people – we obviously have our personal beliefs and stuff, but we've never thought that that's what our music should be about. It's more about us personally, rather than our opinions. But we're so sick of copping shit for being girls in the music scene, so now that we've got this platform, we're really going to tell people what we think – it's time to stop this "girl band" bullshit.

I've always loved the chemistry that you and Anna have onstage – it's like your riffs are in conversation. What's that dynamic like?

Anna is actually such a trooper. They learnt the guitar in the space of, like, two weeks, because we used to have a keyboard player, and we didn't want to cancel gigs after she left the band. We were all stubborn teenagers, so we were like, "No! Anna, you have to learn guitar *now!*" But she was just like, "Okay!" And she just learned how to play power chords in two weeks. Since then, obviously we've all gotten much better at out instruments, but Anna is just that strong foundation – always doing the chords, always pumping it out. I think it's nice, because then I get to do more fun things on top of that. And because I kind of showed her how to play the guitar at the start, we're so in sync now. I think we do complement each other quite well, especially after playing together for so long. They're a good musician, that one!

Did you record all of this EP on your classic red Gibson SG?

I wrote most of it on that, yeah. Bruce is his name, for those wondering, and he is my pride and joy. He's a 1972 model – my dad bought him for me years ago, when we first started the band, and he has a very special place in my heart. It's also just the perfect sound, it's so meaty and awesome. I love it. So yeah, most of it was done on Bruce, but we also used a few Teles here and there for the treble-ier bits.

What about in the way of pedals and effects?

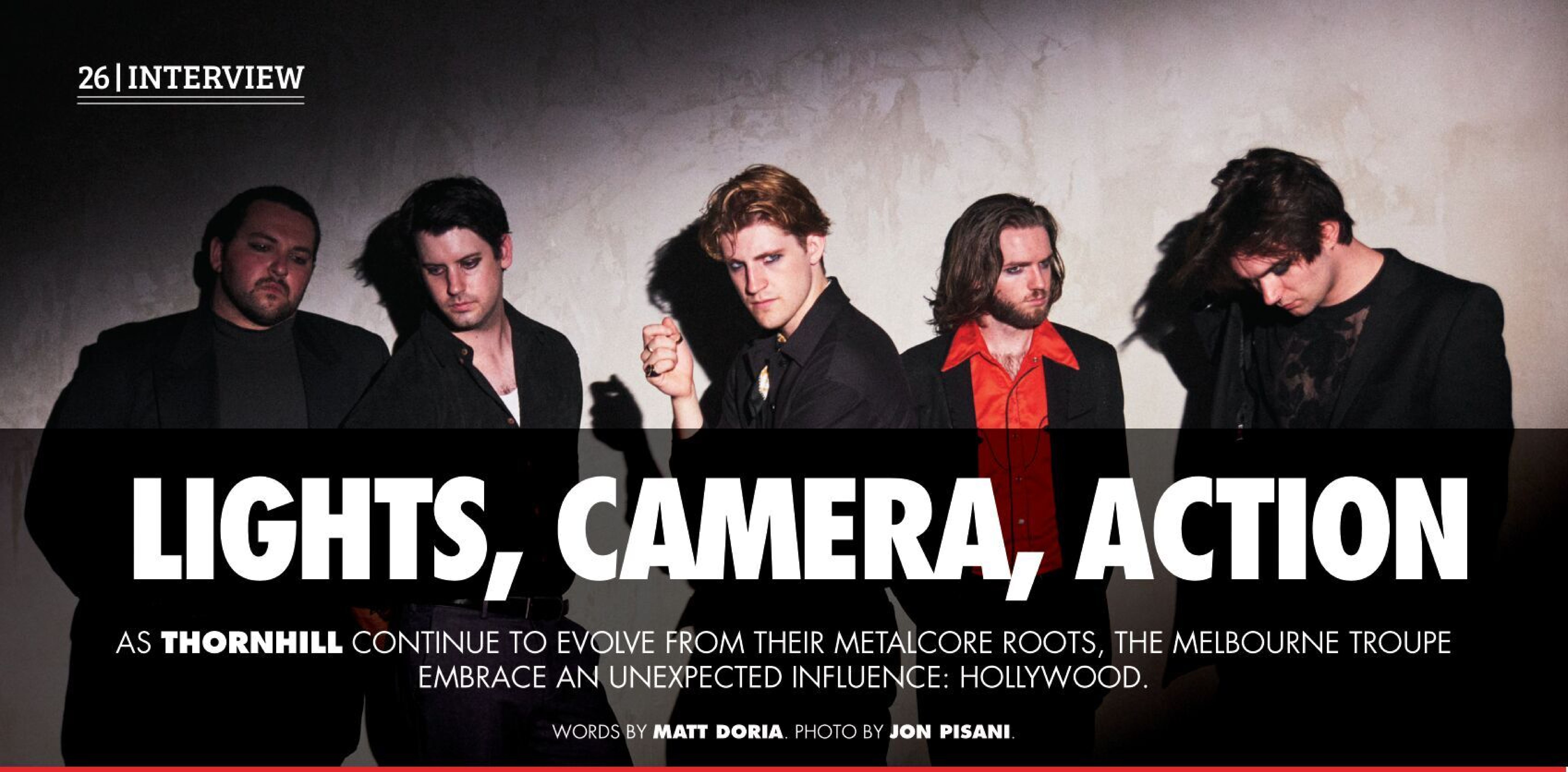
I'm not too fancy, but I do have, like, three overdrive-distortion situations happening on the 'board at all times. I've got one of those classic yellow Boss overdrives, and then this really nice '70s Tube Screamer that my uncle gave me – that's so great for any kind of lead part, that's always the go-to. And then I've got a one-control, strawberry red overdrive – it's like so small, and it fits on the 'board perfectly, and that's just feedback city. And then apart from that, I've just got a fuzz and a chorus, and a tuner.

You guys did this record with James Tidswell, who is probably the biggest nerd I know when it comes to gear. Did you get to f* around with much of his collection?**

Oh, absolutely. I fell in love with the ZVEX Fuzz Factory on that first day – it's so good. We recorded half of the EP with Tidsy and then half of it with Alex Lahey, so between those two, my pedalboard got ripped apart and put back together like 100 times – which was great, I wouldn't change anything [*laughs*]. I used so many different pedals on those tracks as well, I don't think I'll ever be able to track down exactly what they were.

I know you guys did 'Miss Your Birthday' with Alex – what's the split between the Tidsy songs and the Lahey songs?

That's actually a weird one, because I wrote 'Miss Your Birthday' with Alex, but we recorded it with Tidsy. 'AHHHH!', 'Miss Your Birthday' and 'Up To Summit' were all recorded with Tidsy, and then 'Girl Sports' and 'Bull Dragon' were done with Alex and Bonnie Knight. It was great, but it was strange because we weren't expecting to record with Alex. I wrote 'Miss Your Birthday' with her, and then we recorded it with Tidsy, but then we went back to Alex to produce, and I was like, "...Maybe we should have planned this better" [*laughs*]. But hey, it worked out well in the end, so it's fine!



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

AS **THORNHILL** CONTINUE TO EVOLVE FROM THEIR METALCORE ROOTS, THE MELBOURNE TROUPE EMBRACE AN UNEXPECTED INFLUENCE: HOLLYWOOD.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **JON PISANI**.

Music and film have been inseparable since the early days of the latter's existence, and nothing has the power to elevate a movie's impact quite like a powerful soundtrack. But in the case of Thornhill's ambitious new record *Heroine*, the opposite is true – it's a conceptual alt-rock epic that draws its biggest cues from Hollywood, with each track framed as a spiritual score for one of the many classic films and TV shows the band's members were obsessed with in its genesis.

'Arkangel', for example, recalls the moody and melodramatic flair of '90s staples like *Buffy* and *Twin Peaks*, while 'Casanova' plucks its aesthetic from the seminal *Bond* flicks of the '60s and '70s. Twined around Thornhill's smoky and evocative slate of 'core-twinged alt-rock – building on the breadth of grisly, yet atmospherically dense tones laid down their 2019 debut, *The Dark Pool* – *Heroine* serves to further establish the Melbourne maestros as shoe-ins for the next generation of stadium-packing legendaries.

According to guitarist Ethan McCann, that extraordinary scope was at the forefront of Thornhill's ambitions for the record. Though touring for now is confined to clubs and small theatres – and most of the record was minted in bedrooms during last year's COVID-19 lockdowns – the band set out to create something grandiose and theatrical, which could make any sweat-laced dive bar feel like a coliseum. Fittingly, we caught up with McCann just after Thornhill capped off a run of intimate club shows where they previewed *Heroine* in full.

So, how'd the tour go?

Yeah, it was sick! It was a nice change in atmosphere, just because it was much more intimate, we were playing new songs, and it felt much more laidback, not as robotic as our normal set. And then Full Tilt was crazy. That was a bigger deal than UNIFY, to me, just because the crowd was so crazy. It was a real "sparks flying" moment after the past couple years of there being no live shows.

How did you see the new record translating to that live environment?

A few of the songs turned out better than we'd expected, and then other songs didn't go so well. I think because it's quite a different sound, which is quite varied across the album, there's a few sounds and things that we're not really used to doing live. But I think that'll come with practice. And it's cool, because we know what we can get away with now, and we know what we enjoy playing.

I'm curious, given the record's concept, did you still have the live show in mind when you were writing it, or do you see *Heroine* as the kind of record that you really have to sit back and soak in through a good pair of headphones?

For the most part, it's definitely a "sit back and enjoy" kind of album. Songs like like 'Casanova' and 'Leather Wings', which are a bit heavier, we definitely had that live aspect in mind with them, just because the energy is much more sort of hype-y. But I think one of my main focuses – at least for my side of the album, with the instrumentals – were those big chord changes and those big feel and vibe changes, because that's just what I enjoy listening to. That's the sort of stuff where you've really got to sit on the couch, put a good pair of headphones on and just enjoy the ride to appreciate.

How did that your cinematic influences translate to the musicality of Thornhill?

It was really about breaking up the songs into different categories of movies and aesthetics. I basically wrote every song to soundtrack a different movie or TV show, or fit a different aesthetic. We tried to make it so that you can feel and see those things that we were seeing when we were writing these songs. So it comes down to these very specific guitar tones, and the mood of the lyrics and vocal filters, and the way Jacob [Charlton] sings, just like trying to make you feel like these very particular things or make you see things from the perspectives of the characters in these movies.

As a guitarist, what kind of techniques or effects were you exploring to really bring that all to life?

I think I sort of went back to my roots a little bit – I was trying to be a lot more melodic and careful with my decisions with certain parts. Because we were doing the metalcore thing for the first few years of our career, and that was all about going, "What hits the hardest? What grooves the hardest? How can I make people not expect this fat riff coming up?" But this was much more considered. I grew up on bands like the Red Hot Chili Peppers and The Cure and Radiohead – John Frusciante is like my biggest inspiration – so I wanted to channel those styles a bit more. Obviously, I'm not gonna f***ing wail on a solo like [Frusciante], because he's crazy, but I wanted to create melodies that almost sounded like vocal hooks... Just really focusing on the vibe – that was a big thing for me.

Was it fun to experiment more with those atmospheric elements?

Yeah, massively! Especially the strings – the string section was a massive focus for me, because I really enjoy writing more theatrical stuff. Obviously, y'know, I don't have an orchestra at my beck and call, it's just me programming the strings in my bedroom on Logic. But I really enjoy like building those big chords and those big progressions, even if they're kind of unrealistic – because I didn't f***ing know how an orchestra really works [*laughs*]. But I feel like those orchestral chords were able to add voicings and stuff that I couldn't necessarily add with guitar chords alone. It just makes everything sound a bit bigger and a bit more epic. It sort of came back to that late '90s, sort of early 2000s feel – that sort of pantomime-y, Smashing Pumpkins or Silverchair sort of feel. I just love that aesthetic and sound, and I really wanted to work it into our stuff.

What kind of guitars were you shredding out on for this record?

It was mainly just my Ibanez models – the RGIXL7s, which was a 2019 release. They're just really convenient – like, they were the perfect guitar for me, right off the shelf. The reverse headstocks are really cool, and they've got the coil tap, which I was really into messing around with on this album. I use two guitars, and I put the P-90s into my other one, just because I wanted a different tone with a bit of smack. So I use that on 'Casanova' and some of the heavier tracks for that real ballsy, fat P-90 tone.

Are you much of a slut for pedals?

I want to be – I genuinely wish I could say that I was a slut for petals – but I'm a privileged digital baby that does everything on a computer. But that's definitely something we want to lean more into live – I'd love to have some sick pedalboards and focus on a more analogue rig. But yeah, throughout this process, because we were all locked down, I was just noodling around with different effects and seeing what I could get away with on the computer.

SOARING INTO A NEW SCENE

AFTER THREE DECADES LEADING **THE WAIFS**, **VIKKI THORN** SHAKES IT UP WITH A PUNCHY AND POWERFUL BLUES-ROCK RECORD STEEPED IN RAW, RAVENOUS AUTHENTICITY.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **TONI WIKINSON**.

For the past 30 years, Vikki Thorn has been known best for work as an acoustic strummer and singer in the legendary folk-rock vehicle The Waifs. It's been a fruitful journey thus far, and one she's enamoured to continue – eight acclaimed studio albums, countless sold-out treks across the country and the globe, and an adoring legion of fans that never fail to flail when Thorn bore her twee and twangy magic… It's not a bad life to lead. But Thorn has long dreamt of spreading her wings and soaring beyond what's possible The Waifs – to explore an exciting new corner of the rock 'n' roll spectrum she's always admired, but never had the ability to embrace as an artist herself.

Cue: *ThornBird*, a stomping, swampy, hard-rocking blues record that allowed Thorn – alongside longstanding Waifs bassist Ben Franz, plus newcoming axeman Luke Dux, drummer Todd Pickett and all-rounder Dan Carroll – to make her wildest musical dreams come true. So the story goes, Thorn's new project (also dubbed ThornBird) came to life after a chance encounter in a local Albany pub, where stumbled upon a loose and explosive set from an underground band of Perthian rock 'n' rollers shredding out to their hearts' content.

According to Thorn, they "were swaying around with their instruments, not paying attention to anyone that cared to listen", their performance "so loose that it felt like they were skating". She was immediately sold: "I wanted to make a record with these guys," she decided then and there, because she knew that if nothing else, the blokes on that dingy corner stage could deliver the one thing a record like *ThornBird* needs to shine: authenticity. "You can tell when a band has been playing together for a long time," she continued, "[because] the music is a natural conversation. It was raw and edgy."

Midway through a national stint of gigs debuting *ThornBird* to the masses, the woman in charge of the wildness sat *Australian Guitar* down for a peek behind the scenes.

I think this record definitely appeals to fans of The Waifs, but I also like that it's a little more dirty and punchy. Were you excited to explore a little more of a hard-hitting blues-rock sound?

Yeah, that's really what I was going for. I chose the musicians I chose for that reason, because I wanted to really capture that energy. Obviously I didn't want it to sound like The Waifs, but because I write in The Waifs, there's elements in anything I do that are going to sound like that and appeal to that audience. But there was a concerted effort to move away from that. And that was part of why I chose Luke Dux to play on this record, because he's almost like an anti-guitar soloist. He's a very irreverent guitar player, y'know, he never wants to play the same things twice – ever – which is a really fun dynamic to have onstage.

As soon as I heard Luke play, I thought, "I'd love to have that sound on my record." He's got one guitar – this one beat-up Gibson – and that's it. That's his sound. That's his thing. And then couple that with with Todd Pickett… It's unreal. Luke plays in the Kill Devil Hills and The Floors, Todd is in Southern River Band and Kill Devil Hills, and then Dan Carroll, who produced the album, is the guitarist for Southern River Band and The Wilds – so they all come from a rock 'n' roll background. And then [bassist Ben] Franz, of course, is in The Waifs, and he's just my solid right-hand guy in everything.

This record really captures the raw, free energy you get when you see a grungy blues band play in a pub. Was it important for you to keep that looseness intact, and not make this record sound too meticulous?

Yeah. I mean, I'm not that sort of recording artist anyway. I just need to be in the moment when I record – to be able to sing properly, it needs to be a live experience. And a couple of the songs on [*ThornBird*], I did overdub vocals, and I can definitely hear it. I can hear that I'm not singing with the band. But yeah, their looseness and their edge, that's really what I wanted to capture on a lot of these songs. You can hear it really well in that first track, 'That Kinda Man' – it just sounds like you're there with the band, playing in a room together.

The beauty of these guys, too, is that they don't learn the songs – they're all in so many bands and they play with so many call-up session people, they don't really retain the songs, y'know? They don't *learn* everything in the songs, they prefer just to play on the fly. So by the time we pressed record, we'd had one rehearsal, we'd gone through the songs once or twice in the studio, and then we recorded it. So it's *that* raw, y'know? They certainly don't pull stuff apart.

Does that make it fun when you're performing, knowing that every show could be unique?

Yeah! That's Luke's whole thing – he never starts his solos on the same fret, y'know, he just wings it every time. And the other thing is that my lineups always change. Because all of those guys are in a lot of bands, I've had a different lineup for pretty much every gig I've done [as ThornBird]. It's all from the same pool – like Dan Carroll has stepped in to play guitar for Luke when he wasn't available, and Tony Bourke, who used to play with Eskimo Joe and now plays with The Waifs, I've stolen him for this. Coming out of a band like The Waifs, where we've had the same lineup for 30 years, it's so much fun to step onstage every night and connect in a different way with what people are doing. It's really exciting.

Was it exciting, too, to make a record without being bound to the legacy of The Waifs?

Yeah, because y'know, with The Waifs, we have such a strong fanbase, and our fanbase has a really strong history with particular songs. We always want to create that experience for the fans when we play, so there's always going to be, y'know, the staple five or six songs in that set – you want to give your audience the stuff they love. And then on top of that, it's harder to put new material in, because when you've got six or seven albums worth of material, there's not a lot of room for many new songs.

That's the other thing – just being in charge of the setlist and being able to play what *I* want to play, and being able to make that decision on the night and in the moment. I'm going to play songs off the record, but I've also got songs that *aren't* on the record, and I do actually play a couple of Waifs songs that never get played at The Waifs' own shows. It is really liberating, as an artist, to step aside from that ethos of, "I'm in The Waifs, I travel around Australia in a camper van with these guys, and that's my story." To be able to step outside of that and create another story, and show a different part of who you are… It's nice to have that part of you represented.

So those non-album songs, are they tracks that just didn't make the cut for *ThornBird?*

Yeah, they're all songs that didn't make it onto the record. I went way over the line with how many songs I wrote for the record. Everybody said, "You can only have ten songs!" But y'know, I had so many ideas to record, I couldn't keep it to just ten. And there's a couple of songs on this record – like 'Big Girl Pants' and 'Like A Child' – which were recorded a year after [the initial sessions]. And so a couple of other songs were bumped off for those. Ultimately, I just went with the songs that I loved the most. It's sort of quite disparate, this record, but individually I loved everything about those recordings.

THE MAN IN THE MOON

ON HIS MILESTONE TENTH ALBUM, XAVIER RUDD EMBRACES CULTURE, COUNTRY AND COMMUNITY WITH INIMITABLE PASSION.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **FRANCESCO PRANDONI**.

Born and raised in the coastal Victorian town of Jan Juc, Xavier Rudd has always been passionate about his spiritual connection to the Earth. Culture and community were ingrained in his soul from the second he first smelt a cool ocean breeze, and such has been a central theme of his music thus far. So for his milestone tenth album, *Jan Juc Moon*, Rudd endeavoured to embrace his roots more poignantly than ever before. And from the moment that the first gauzy, glittering synth on 'I Am Eagle' rings out, it's clear he succeeded.

Don't let the 70-minute runtime throw you off: on *Jan Juc Moon*, Rudd explores everything from twee folk-rock and sunkissed indie to kaleidoscopic psych-pop, whiskey-soaked blues and belting hip-hop. Imbibed with the influence of traditional First Nations music, it's a riveting listen that, at the end of the day, feels oddly short. It's no hyperbole to say that *Jan Juc Moon* is Rudd's magnum opus – and he knows it, with plans to spread it to the farthest corners of so-called Australia on a 37-date road tour.

Before he kicks that off at the end of May, Rudd hung out with *Australian Guitar* to fill us in on the origins of *Jan Juc Moon*.

What made you want to really dig back into your roots for this record?

After 20 years of doing the overseas touring circuit, I took a break. And that's when the pandemic started, so I hadn't planned on making a record, but I felt like during that time, everything was so bizarre, the world changed so much. We were travelling – we went up to the cape, and we were in a pretty remote, country area, so whenever I'd come into civilisation, I'd sort of hear about what was going on. And I guess it was a state of reflection, y'know? Everyone was in this reflective period, wondering what was happening and where they were going, and where the world was at – and so I was I. I was reflecting back a lot on my life and my career… It was kind of like this big reset.

So I started writing the record in that frame of mind, looking back and reflecting on everything. 'Jan Juc Moon', the song, I wrote that… It would be more than ten years ago now – around when I recorded the *Spirit Bird* album, I actually recorded a version of that song but I never released it. And so that came back up for me. It felt like the right time to re-record that track, and then it ended up being the title track.

So did the rest of this record sort of bloom from the revitalised 'Jan Juc Moon'?

Not really. I had already been writing a bunch of music when I revisited the old recording of that song. I'd been thinking about a lot of stuff. But when I wrote that song, it was a difficult time for me. I was down in Jan Juc at the time, I was living down there and there was this massive moon – the scientists were saying back then that it was the biggest moon we'd ever seen at the time. I was going through a bit of a tough time, and just staring up at that moon, I felt like everything was getting pulled away by it. It was like this big moon was just dragging me away from everything I knew.

It was taking me away from my son, and that was tough; there was a lot of family stuff happening then. And when I recorded [the new version of 'Jan Juc Moon'], my fourth boy was in the womb. I recorded his heartbeat from ultrasound, when he was still in the belly, and I actually used that throughout the track. So that was kind of cool for me – it was like this new breath, a new beginning for a new decade – all that stuff really came into focus around that song and my re-recording of it. It was a very 'full circle' kind of thing, and that's when I thought, "Yeah, I'm going to call this record *Jan Juc Moon*."

Having made this record, do you feel like you now have an even stronger bond with your culture and heritage?

Yeah, look, my heritage is unknown. It's been printed that I'm Wurundjeri, but we don't know that. My great grandmother was taken from a Wurundjeri country, but we don't know anything about her – it's an ongoing journey, but it seems to get misprinted all the time from that story. It's a personal search that I'm on, to find our history there. I definitely feel the presence of my culture in the music, and I am very connected to Country in a way that speaks through my music.

Often, the spirit that comes through my music doesn't feel like me. It feels like it comes from another place – it's relatable when I'm writing music that's about, or comes from an emotional place in me, and it's pretty clear that it's me, or something that I'm feeling, but then sometimes there's all this other music that comes through me, that just feels like it comes from somewhere else. I attribute that to spirit, ancestors, whatever – and I respect that. I think the spirit of this country resides in all of my music. But y'know, it's so hard to put that into words – what that is, or who that is, or whether it's related to me – those questions are always there, but I kind of treat it like it's separate to me.

I have this huge amount of respect for the spirit in the music, but the way I treat it… It's like if you were to take your grandmother to church – you just take her to church, you wouldn't tell her what to wear, y'know? It's kind of like that for me – I let the music come through me, and I try not to let my ego get too involved. I try to just let it be pure and just be a vessel for it. And then on this record, I was able to link up with other mob – there was some Bundjalung mob who shared their traditional song on 'I Am Eagle', which was really beautiful. And then J-MILLA was the perfect artist to come in and do his verse for 'Ball And Chain', based on what that song is about. They were the only collaborations I had on the record, and they were perfect. I did everything else myself, which I hadn't done for a long time.

This record runs for over an hour, but it's so musically diverse and expansive that it could be twice as long and still feel short. Where do you glean all the inspiration for these sonic detours?

I don't know – they just sort of come to be, y'know? I've always made music, since I was little, and I've never really been one to sit down and write a song. They just sort of come to me, as I'm doing whatever. And I'm not really very strict with it, either – I kind of let it flow, and if an idea stays with me, then I'll eventually produce it. Sometimes a song will be floating around in my head for a year before I even take it to an instrument. I've got to construct things in my mind first, and I'm in no rush, usually, to take them anywhere. The ideas that disappear from my head, I don't really care about those, because I feel like the ones that are meant to stay will stay. And then eventually I get to a point where I think, "Alright, it's time to dump this stuff out." ag

WOLVES ON THE PROWL

WITH SOME OF THEIR MOST VICIOUS MUSIC YET ON THE HORIZON, **ALPHA WOLF** ARE GEARING UP TO DOMINATE AUSTRALIA'S METALCORE SCENE. FIRST ON THE AGENDA: THE BIGGEST TOUR THE GENRE'S SEEN HERE IN YEARS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

No bands spur tours more off-the-rails than those in Australian metalcore. The 2000s were defined by sprawling, months-long road tours with back-to-back shows in 20-plus towns, a good deal of which would read like gibberish to the everyday city slicker. In the 2010s, there evolved somewhat of an unspoken contest between the bands, to see who could reel in the most insane supports. This led to a trend where, thanks to self-funded runs and the power of the internet, up-and-coming acts could make a name for themselves by headlining over (much more popular) international bands, using those names on the poster as the tour's primary selling points.

Thanks in no short part to the COVID-19 pandemic, those batshit mental tours came to a fiery death at the turn of the new decade. Border restrictions made it impossible to fly in those big-ticket foreigners. Varying state guidelines made it impossible to organise those serpentine itineraries. And of course, the general decimation of the live music industry made it impossible to fund – let alone embark on – tours in general. But with the world slowly easing back into normalcy, one band – Tasmania-native, Melbourne-based moshlords Alpha Wolf – have set their sights on an ambitious return to the glory days of unapologetically wild metalcore tours.

Next month, they're heading out on a nine-date stint dubbed *The Metalcore Snitches Tour*, hitting stages in Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart, Canberra, Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. In tow, they'll have US heavyweights Fit For A King and Great American Ghost, as well as the Japanese trailblazers in Paledusk. And while fans can expect an onslaught of scorchers from the band's 2020 album, *A Quiet Place To Die*, they can also expect Alpha Wolf to bust out some brutal new tunes, previewing a new record for release later this year.

Ahead of the tour's sure-to-be explosive start, *Australian Guitar* sat down with lead axeman Scott Simpson to get the lowdown on how Alpha Wolf are making 2022 their bitch.

How does it feel to be headlining the biggest metalcore tour that Australia's seen this decade?

This is the tour we've wanted to do since 2020. We've had, like, four or five iterations of this it ready to be announced, but obviously because of COVID, we had to keep pushing it back and back. And then a few months ago, we were just like, "F*** it, we're just going to announce it – who knows if it's gonna happen, but these are the dates, we're announcing them." Fingers crossed [*laughs*]. We just really wanted to do a tour like the ones we grew up going to – the Parkway Drives, the f***ing Amity Afflictions, they always brought out those big international packages. We've always wanted to do that, and now we're finally the stage where we *can* do that. Hopefully this is just the first of many big tours to come.

I feel like a tour of this caliber would've taken *so much* effort to pull off.

Yeah, shoutout to Ash [Hull] at Destroy All Lines – he's our booking agent, and the poor feller has gone through so many reiterations of this and put together so many new dates. It was a mammoth effort to get something like this in motion, and it's all thanks to him, really. We just put forward the bands we want to play with, and then he figures out all the hard stuff [*laughs*].

We know you'll be playing new music on the run. What can we look forward to? Is it a one-off track, or is there a new album on the way?

It's not album three, but it's not a standalone track either. I don't want to give too much away, because it's really cool – it's something we've been working on for a little bit now. I'll leave it at that.

So going from *A Quiet Place To Die* into this elusive new chapter of Alpha Wolf, how did you want to really kick things up to the next level?

It's kind of difficult to put into words how it happened, moreso just because *A Quiet Place To Die* was based on our experiences touring, playing the earlier songs live and experiencing the world on the back of [2017's *Mono*], realising what worked and what didn't work, and then putting what worked on steroids. But we couldn't do that again after we put *A Quiet Place To Die* out, because we released that album from our bedrooms in lockdown. We didn't get to play those songs live for nearly 12 months after they came out, and at that stage we'd already started writing the new stuff.

I'd say it's like the best parts of [*A Quiet Place To Die*], but better. We're trying to step into some new territory, while still keeping what it is we do best. We never want to release the same album twice, that's for sure. We're always going to be a heavy band, so it's definitely going to be heavy.

Are you still running with your two ESP LTDs?

Yes! They're modded with Fishman pickups and EverTune bridges, and the baritone scale length as well. That triple combo – the baritone scale, Fishmans and EverTunes – we can't play without it. That's kind of like the Alpha Wolf sound.

You've said in the past that the EverTune bridges are as important as the guitars themselves. Why is that?

I still back that claim. We play in very low tunings, like drop G, drop F – we have a song that goes down to double drop B sharp – so with the EverTune bridge, the way it handles keeping in tune is a total game-changer for us. We go out onstage and we don't have to check our tuning once in the entire set. They just hold, because that's what they're made to do. We also sweat a crazy amount when we play, and that always makes the guitar go out of tune so quickly, especially when it's tuned that low. Yeah, I'd say the EverTune is even *more* important than the guitars I play. I wouldn't play without one anymore, to be honest.

As far as the rig goes, you play with a mix of the Kemper effects and analogue pedals, don't you?

Yeah, so aside from the whammy, all of the pedals are just there for a bit of fun, really. We just we like to make a little bit of noise here and there – I usually swap out most of those pedals every tour, just so I can play around with different ones that make a lot of noise and do really stupid shit. The Kemper is there for all of our main tones, who we have to thank Lance Prenc [of Prenc Audio], our sound engineer, for. We use the album tones – it's literally just a copy of the tones we play on the albums.

So as far as those pedals go, what are your favourites at the moment?

The one I've kept docked for a hot minute is... I can't actually remember the brand name. It's this dirt-cheap, $30 delay pedal that I've maxxed out every setting on, so I can just turn the delay knob and have it make these really stupid noises. There's usually a chorus and a flanger [on the pedalboard] too, with all the settings at full blast on those as well. I also have a Behringer multi-effect units, which is horrible – it sounds *disgusting* – but when you turn everything on together, it sounds great.

Anything that makes a cool noise is sick. I actually broke my DigiTech Whammy on the last tour we did – it just stopped working all of a sudden, so I took it off my 'board, and now we have a EHX Pitch Fork+. That thing is really, really cool – we use it in the same way we used the Whammy, but it just sounds way dirtier and way grosser, which is exactly what we wanted. So we've got a few songs in the works that rely on that pedal heavily in different ways. I think that's going to be the one pedal that stays on the 'board, and then everything else we'll just swap out all the time.

WORDS BY
RICHARD BIENSTOCK

PHOTOS BY
JONATHAN WEINER

FRUSCIANTE, UNLIMITED

IN THIS CANDID CONVERSATION, JOHN FRUSCIANTE EXPOUNDS ON THE BENEFITS OF KICKING YOUR EGO TO THE CURB, TRUSTING YOURSELF AS A PLAYER, RELIGIOUSLY MEMORISING CHARLIE CHRISTIAN'S GUITAR SOLOS, AND HOW THE PIECES FELL INTO PLACE FOR HIS RETURN TO THE RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

"I think that at the beginning of my time in the band, I had my mind too much on trying to impress people, and I wasn't trusting myself enough"

JOHN

FRUSCIANTE WAS JUST 18 WHEN HE WAS OFFERED THE GUITAR slot in the Red Hot Chili Peppers. By that time, he had spent years honing his skills on the instrument, immersing himself in the playing of Hendrix, Beck and Page; Eddie Van Halen and Randy Rhoads; Steve Howe, Steve Hackett and Steve Vai; Frank Zappa and Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew. He listened to the Germs and the B-52's and Siouxsie and the Banshees, to Sly Stone and James Brown and Parliament, to funk and punk and rock and prog and shred and new wave and goth. "I went through many phases," Frusciante says. "Every year I was kind of a different person when I was growing up playing guitar, because as I kept getting better, my tastes kept changing toward something that was a little more difficult to play."

But for all the music he loved — and he loved a lot of music — Frusciante loved the Red Hot Chili Peppers the most. "They were my favorite band," he tells us one afternoon over Zoom. Living in L.A. at the time, he says, "I saw them as often as I could. You went to one of their shows, and there was this magic energy that was happening. It was like being in a dream."

It would stand to reason, then, that being tapped to become a full-fledged participant in that magic energy would be, well, a guitar player's dream. And to be sure, when Frusciante officially became a Pepper in 1988, he brought with him, as might be expected, the unbridled energy and enthusiasm of a kid who had just won the rock guitar lottery. Another thing he brought? Sheer chops, with a high level of technical facility on his instrument (by this time, he says, he could peel off most any Frank Zappa instrumental, as well as all the solos on Alcatrazz's 1985 metal platter, *Disturbing the Peace*, which were performed by a then up-and-coming six-stringer named Steve Vai) that enabled the predominantly punk-funk-based act to venture into previously unexplored musical realms.

But still, something was missing. "The first year or so that I was in the band was definitely a struggle," Frusciante says.

He pauses, then restarts. "I've got something to say that I think could probably be good for guitar players. I think that at the beginning of my time in the band, I had my mind too much on trying to impress people, and I wasn't trusting myself enough. I was feeling all these things — 'I want to be unique,' 'I want to show off,' 'I want to stand out' — and everything I was doing felt forced. I didn't feel free and I didn't feel like I was saying anything that I wanted to say. I didn't feel like I was going deep in myself."

Frusciante's first album with the Chili Peppers, 1989's *Mother's Milk*, added a hookier, harder-rocking element to their sound, with bigger, thicker riffs and faster, flashier leads. The album was their most successful to date and became their first gold-certified seller. But, Frusciante says, "by the time we were ending that tour, I got to such a point of unhappiness that I said, 'I'm just going to throw away all these things I'm trying to do. I'm going to stop trying to grab people's attention. I'm going to take my ego out of it entirely.' "

Instead, he continues, "I decided I was just going to use my guitar to try to support the other people in my band. So I simplified what I was doing. And at the same time, I was also putting a hundred times the amount of personal expression and soul into it than I had before."

This change, according to Frusciante, "was the step that, all of a sudden, made people respond strongly to what I was doing. I wasn't trying to be a Red Hot Chili Pepper in terms of what I thought other people thought that was — I just started being myself. And that honest version of myself is what you've had ever since."

THAT HONEST VERSION, combined with an open creative mind and a determination to always play for the song, has been a through-line in all of Frusciante's work, from the slinky single-note funk licks, fluid, Hendrix-y chordal melodies and hard-hitting riffage that characterized his playing on 1991's epochal *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, to the sparse, vocal-like lines that matched the airy sonic landscapes of "Scar Tissue" and "Californication," both from 1999's *Californication*. It's there in the sometimes way-out excursions and experimentations of the many solo efforts he produced during his time(s) away from the band. And it's also there on the new *Unlimited Love,* Frusciante's first record with the Red Hot Chili Peppers in roughly 15 years.

Not surprisingly, the new album is hotly anticipated. The Chili Peppers have had several extraordinary guitarists in the band over the course of their lifetime, from the late Hillel Slovak (who Frusciante has always acknowledged as a massive influence), to Jane's Addiction's Dave Navarro to, most recently, Josh Klinghoffer, who played on their last two albums, 2011's *I'm With You* and 2016's *The Getaway*. But, arguably, it's the combination of Frusciante's guitar in tandem with Flea's bass, Chad Smith's drums and Anthony Kiedis' vocals that constitutes, for many fans, the definitive version of the band.

John Frusciante, photographed in early March with his 1962 Fender Strat — "My main guitar since I rejoined the band the first time," he says

And there's plenty of music on *Unlimited Love* to back up that position. The record itself is a massive undertaking, with 17 songs spread across more than an hour of music. Throughout, Frusciante's playing is nothing short of stunning. There's the opener and first single, "Black Summer," on which his liquid chords give way to bright chorus melodies and a pile-driving, fuzz-powered solo, and the hushed closer "Tangelo," built around his gentle, almost classical fingerpicking. There's the cascading tremolo lines of "The Great Apes" and the surfy tones and complex chording of "White Braids & Pillow Chair." There's the circular, ominous single-note patterns that close "Veronica" and the waves of squalling feedback he rides to cathartic release in "The Heavy Wing."

The result is not just a great Red Hot Chili Peppers album, but one that shows the band, more than 30 years after Frusciante joined for the first time, still reaching new heights together. "When I first started talking with Flea," Frusciante recalls about his latest return to the fold, "we said to each other, 'If we start playing together again, we should do something completely different than what we've done before.' "

At the time Frusciante and Flea had this conversation, it's worth noting, there was no guarantee they *would* actually play together again, at least not as the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Frusciante had left the band in 2009, following the massive world tour in support of their *Stadium Arcadium* album, in order to pursue his own music. He spent the next decade immersed in a solo career that saw him heavily exploring synth and electronic music. But he never stopped playing guitar.

"I was making electronic music, but I also went through a period not too long ago where I was playing along with a lot of Charlie Christian stuff," he says. "My pattern was, I would make electronic music six days a week, and one day a week I would spend about 15, 16 hours learning Charlie Christian solos. By the end of that year, I had learned all his solos that he'd done with Benny Goodman, with Lionel Hampton — I had memorized all of them."

During this time, Frusciante and Flea rekindled their friendship. "And Flea, jazz is the first music that formed his musical mind," he says. "So he was excited that I was learning this Charlie Christian stuff, and he told me to tell him a few songs to learn and he'd learn 'em. We got together a couple of times to do that, and then at one point later on I had some drum machine beats that were ready to go at my studio, and we jammed on those for a couple hours, just me on my Strat and him on his bass. It had nothing to do with the concept of me being in the band again. It was just, we had done this Charlie Christian stuff, and it seemed like it would be fun to jam along to drum machines."

From there, the pieces began serendipitously falling into place. "Around that same time, I had run into Chad somewhere, and Chad mentioned he'd love to jam with me," Frusciante says, then laughs. "And so it was, well, who are we gonna get to play bass? Like, I don't know that many bass players! But Flea and I had just had that awesome jam together, so I said to him, 'Chad mentioned he'd like to play sometime. Would you be up for the three of us getting together?' And Flea went, 'Yeah, that'd be cool.'

"And I remember he paused for about 10 seconds, and then he said, 'You ever think

UNLIMITED LOVE

A SLEW OF TALENTED PLAYERS SELECT JOHN FRUSCIANTE'S FINEST MUSICAL MOMENTS (AND WINNINGEST QUALITIES!)

By Amit Sharma, Jim Beaugez, Damian Fanelli, Joshua Miller, Joe Bosso and Damon Orion

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"John has always been an MVP in any band he performs with. He always writes the perfect part, and his passion for vintage recording gear captures his tone magnificently. Perhaps one of my favorite performances by him is an obscure one, 'Inca Roads' by Frank Zappa, performed solo live. Anyone who can play it is a Jedi boss! I never had to play that part when I was with Frank, thank goodness."

— STEVE VAI

"For me it's 'Otherside' off of Californication. It's a great example of how the simplest guitar parts can be so clever and well-fitting for a band like RHCP. I can't imagine that writing parts to complement Flea's grooves (without getting in the way) is an easy task. Frusciante is the very definition of a guitarist who doesn't overplay — and always lays down such appropriate ideas that include his specific voice."

— NILI BROSH

"JF is among the very few guitar players of our generation that came up with his own very distinctive sound, and that's not an easy thing to do on an instrument that has been around for a long, long time. Despite his being on my radar forever, it wasn't until our 2019 album, Mettavolution, that you can hear his influence — and it'll be very present in the new Rodrigo y Gabriela album."

— RODRIGO SANCHEZ (RODRIGO Y GABRIELA)

"John's songwriting and his sense for harmony and sound has always been so inspiring. Curtains [Frusciante's 2005 solo album] is a masterpiece that showcases all of that — and 'A Name' or 'Time Tonight' are two of my favorites."

— PHILIPP DAUSCH (MILKY CHANCE)

"What I love most about John Frusciante is the way his style has the clear roots of old-

about rejoining the Red Hot Chili Peppers?' "

At the time, Klinghoffer was still the Chili Peppers' guitarist. But the chemistry between Frusciante and his old band mates was undeniable. "So I said to Flea, 'Yeah, I have thought about it,' Frusciante continues. "And from there we talked about it for a bit. Then Flea went and talked to Anthony, and Anthony said he was psyched about the idea."

Even so, Frusciante resisted. He had already left the band two times — first in 1992, when he found himself increasingly uncomfortable with how massively famous the Chilis had become in the wake of the breakout success of *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, and then again after *Stadium Arcadium*. "Being in a band with other people, it can be really hard when you're in that vulnerable position and putting your heart and soul into everything you do," he reasons. "And I would say the biggest problem we ever had was not communicating at times when it would've been really productive to communicate. So I wanted to talk things through and be sure nobody had any false expectations."

He wanted to be so sure, in fact, that when Flea and Kiedis met with him a few weeks later to discuss the possibility of reuniting, "I really tried to make it clear in every way why they might *not* want me to be back in the band," Frusciante says. "I even made notes, because I wanted to list as many reasons as I could why they might regret the decision, you know?"

But in the end, he says, "there was nothing I said that swayed them."

FRUSCIANTE IS THE most significant return to the Chili Peppers fold on *Unlimited Love*, but he's not the only one. The band also reunited with producer Rick Rubin, who has helmed every Chili Peppers studio album since *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, save for the recent *The Getaway*. Given the turn of events this time out, it seemed a no-brainer to bring him back. Rubin was invited to the band's first rehearsal with Frusciante, and said in a recent interview that seeing the four musicians playing together again led him to feel so overcome with emotion that he began to cry.

When the reunited band set up shop at Rubin's Malibu recording compound, Shangri-La, they worked hard and fast. "We recorded 50 songs in three weeks," Frusciante says. The guitarist lived at the studio during the sessions, and in his bedroom there, he continues, "I had a big picture of Johnny Thunders on my left, and I had a big picture of Randy Rhoads on my right. And I had a picture of Jimi Hendrix behind a mixing console in the middle of me. It wasn't a planned thing, but it seemed to sum up like where I was at in terms of the style I was trying to do on the record."

Those three guitarists may have been a consistent visual presence for him during the sessions, but there were other players on Frusciante's mind as well. "As far as lead guitar playing," he says, "the things I kept listening to over and over and playing along with were

"I picked up my guitar and I went, 'Hmmm… I wonder if I can still write a rock song'

"My pattern was, I would make electronic music six days a week, and one day a week I would spend about 15, 16 hours learning Charlie Christian solos," Frusciante says

Jeff Beck's *Blow by Blow* and *Wired*, and Freddie King's *The Complete King Federal Singles*, which is all of his earliest singles compiled onto a double CD. I was memorizing those solos all the time."

What was so appealing about Beck and King's playing? "I really love the way they make each note have its own personality – like, every note is a separate emotional event," Frusciante says. "Which is something people often lose when they're playing fast all the time – the notes are all kind of played the same way, and they can't have much distinction between them because they're going too fast. But I wanted to play in a way that was lyrical and emotive and expressive. So Jeff Beck, Freddie King, Albert King, those were big ones for me during the recording process. There were others as well, but those were a few I kept coming back to."

From here, Frusciante's discussion about his guitar approach moves from the technical realm into something more spiritual. "I also was really inspired by people for [*whom*] it's not really about techniques as such, but more about the energy they put into the instrument – where it feels like they're making the instrument explode," he says. "To me, there's a couple ways of doing that. Like, Eddie Van Halen did that. A lot of it had to do with his technique, but there was also so much energy that went into those techniques. Randy Rhoads, too. Every time he would start a solo, it was really exciting, you know? It was an event that you looked forward to."

He continues, "So that's one kind of energy. Then there's the kind of energy of someone like Johnny Thunders, especially on the first Heartbreakers album, where it's not so much about being in control of the instrument, but more about being out of control and making the instrument sound like it's going to explode in your hands. Johnny Thunders was really good at that. Greg Ginn was really good at that. Kurt Cobain was really good at that. So a lot of what I was trying to do on this record was to play in a way that sort of bridged the gap between these forms of expression – there's delicate little details, and then there's moments of practically smashing the instrument. I was concentrating on both of these things."

An example of these extremes in guitar approach coming together on *Unlimited Love* would be Frusciante's lead playing on "The Great Apes." "On that song, in both the middle solo and the solo I do at the very end, I feel like what I'm doing is a sum of all these different things," Frusciante says. "There's fast playing in it, but the most important thing is there's a lot of expression in it."

There's also, he adds, a lot of intensity. "It's that thing of making the guitar sound like if there's any more intensity going through it, it's just gonna blow up."

JOHN FRUSCIANTE'S TIME in (and out of) the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and the very high highs and very low lows that have gone along with it, has been well documented. Through it all, he says, there's a bond that has been forged between the band members that can never be broken. "We have a special relationship because we went from being a club band to an arena band together," he says. "Like, when I was first in the band, we had some bummer shows. Not all the time, but we had shows where nobody showed up, or shows where we were feeling like the audience wasn't as enthused as they had been before I joined. So we had to build our energy together to make something new out of the band. And we pulled that out of each other. That's a connection we share that nobody else can share with us, because it's only the four of us that had that experience."

It's an experience, Frusciante also acknowledges, that is very different from the one that the original version of the band – Flea, Kiedis, guitarist Hillel Slovak and drummer Jack Irons – shared. "Those guys knew each other in junior high school and high school, and they went from being kind of bummy guys

school guitar greats like Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa, yet still remains completely of the times (if not a little bit futuristic). His heroes pushed the limits of the instrument and inspired generations of people to pick up the guitar… and John has done the same!"

– **AYLA TESLER-MABE**

"One of the first albums I bought for myself was Blood Sugar Sex Magik. The interplay between the bass and rhythm guitar is so in the pocket and organic – lots of innovative, understated guitar moments followed by chaos and fireworks. The solo on 'I Could Have Lied' is so expressive and emotional; it adds this desperation to Anthony Kiedis' delivery. I loved the guitar playing on the title track – it's riff-driven, melodic, explosive. The whole album kills."

– **SAMANTHA FISH**

"Original, raw, heartfelt and pure, Herculean and supernatural – these are some of the words I would use to describe John's guitar playing. Whether he's working with the cleanest of clean tones with a total absence of ambience, or the craziest of fuzzed-out, psychedelic, melt-your-face-off lead sounds, he always makes it feel natural and sound personal. John's live performances with the Chili Peppers are exceptional examples of his organic, highly creative and high-energy approach to using a Strat."

– **JOE SATRIANI**

"By the Way was one of the first albums I ever heard. I was instantly fascinated by John's playing and I always thought he had such an interesting style; it's so dynamic and expressive, and you can tell it's him straight away. Not to mention his tones are absolutely stunning! His songwriting is awesome too, always playing for the song and giving it exactly what it needs."

– **SOPHIE BURRELL**

"I vividly remember hearing 'Under the Bridge' the first time and not being able to fathom that it was just one guitar. There were bass notes, harmony and lead lines all happening at once, and for someone who had convinced himself that power chords were all that was needed, it was like he was playing a different instrument entirely. It's an experience John himself has echoed

numerous times as he described hearing 'Little Wing' for the first time — that melodic style of rhythm playing that Curtis Mayfield pioneered and Jimi Hendrix expanded on is an integral part of my playing today; John was the first person I heard put it to such good use."

— CHRIS BUCK

"One of my first-ever public performances was at summer camp playing air guitar along to 'Under the Bridge.' John was one of my earliest influences in that way. I was fascinated just mimicking him. I think he's brilliant, one of my favorites. The Red Hot Chilli Peppers Live at Slane Castle is one of the all-time best live performances ever captured on footage, and it's at least half because of John's contribution."

— LAURA JANE GRACE (SOLO, AGAINST ME!)

"My favorite piece from Frusciante would, hands down, be 'Snow (Hey Oh)' — for several reasons. Aside from the absolutely legendary complex arpeggio executed in a legato liquid manner, and the mass cultural timeless effect it has had since its recording, the homage paid to the traditions of J.S. Bach in the chordal cycle of the riff reminds us that sometimes the simple magics of this universe are just what our souls need."

— DANIEL DONATO

"John Frusciante is responsible for some of the most catchy and recognisable riffs in music. My fave is 'Dani California.' Although he's one of the most skilful guitarists out there, he's not hugely technical — he just has enormous feel and doesn't rely on fast, crazy runs to impress. He uses things such as dynamics and tonal range, interesting pedal effects and his other-worldly timing to compliment any song he's playing on."

— SOPHIE LLOYD

"'Scar Tissue' is one of my favorite Frusciante performances. I love the slide solos, and the main guitar parts are so economical, just like so much of his writing/playing. Obviously, you can hear his influences such as Hendrix, etc., but the parts he composes are uniquely his own. They are always deceivingly hard to pull off and most of the time you can sing his solos note for note. To me, that's a mark of a great guitarist."

— SADLER VADEN (SOLO, JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT)

"Every guitar part in 'Under the Bridge' is iconic. The beginning is very stark and nearly

Frusciante with his '62 Fiesta Red Fender Jaguar

> "I REALLY TRIED TO MAKE IT CLEAR IN EVERY WAY WHY THEY MIGHT NOT WANT ME TO BE BACK IN THE BAND"

sleeping on people's floors to realizing, 'Wow, when we step onstage, we have this energy that makes a whole club of people dance,' " Frusciante says. "For me, nothing we've ever done touches that lineup in terms of the energy I felt at their shows."

Frusciante's reverence for the original Red Hot Chili Peppers lineup runs deep, and it is sincere. So much so that, a week after our interview, he checks back in to further articulate how it felt to join his "favorite band in the world."

"I just wanted to keep playing in the style they had created with Jack and Hillel," he says. "I thought I would play like Hillel, but flashier. After about nine months I realized the flashiness wasn't impressing anyone, and there wasn't really a place for it in the band chemistry, so for a while after that I just relied on my energy. Those first nine months, I had the impression that a lot of their audience wasn't into me, but by the time we released *Mother's Milk*, I felt pretty accepted."

Regarding the particular influence of Slovak, who tragically died of a heroin overdose at just 26 years old [*in 1988*], Frusciante says, "I'm very lucky to have replaced such a great stylist. The challenge of attempting to appeal to his audience was character-building, and even when my own style appeared, I was still using his style as the basis for what I did. And luckily for me, there was some strange confluence of souls, where the more I stayed within the parameters laid out by Hillel, the more I sounded like myself. I wanted to make the band sound good, and I stopped caring about how I might come across. I became content to back up the other guys in the band and, unexpectedly, that made me stand out more, rather than less. To this day I see Hillel's style as the center of my own, where the band is concerned. He was a team player, and he added color and meaning to his bandmates' contributions, and that's what I try to do."

Interestingly, for all of Frusciante's youthful devotion to the Chili Peppers, he also says that "getting into them was actually a very gradual thing." He was first turned on to the band when he was 14, when his guitar teacher at the time auditioned for a spot in the then-fledgling act. "This was at the time when Hillel and Jack had quit [*both eventually rejoined the group*], and so they were looking for a new guitarist and drummer," Frusciante says. "They got Cliff Martinez from Captain Beefheart's band to play drums, and for guitar it was between Jack Sherman and my teacher. He didn't get the job, but I knew about the band from him telling me that he was auditioning."

Not long after that, a friend gave Frusciante a compilation of Chili Peppers music. Frusciante liked what he heard, but, he says, "it wasn't until I saw them live that they became my favorite band. This was when the original band, with Jack and Hillel, had gotten back together, and I'd never seen anything like it. The energy was incredible. I jumped around the entire show, and the whole thing was just this psychedelic blur. Everyone was really happy, and it didn't feel like the band and the audience were separate. So if you ask what I loved about them, that's it — that magic energy."

As evidenced on *Unlimited Love*, that magic energy is still alive in the Red Hot Chili Peppers today. But it requires tending to. "I think I loved the band with the Hillel lineup so much that, at the beginning of my time with them, all I could think about was that energy, and trying to match that energy," Frusciante says. "And I thought that meant being as fiery a guitar player as possible, on every level."

What it actually meant, as Frusciante returns to, was finding that "honest version" of himself as a guitar player. "Once I stopped forcing it," he says, "that's when it started to feel like, 'Wow, we really do have that same magic energy as the band had with Hillel.' "

Frusciante pauses. "Like, we're not *trying* to have it, you know? We just have it." ag

plain. When the hi-hats enter, you can hear the Jimi Hendrix influence; John deconstructed Hendrix's vibe and built it back up into his own thing. Sure, you can hear Jimi's influence, but John's invention is absolutely identifiable. The variety of sounds he gets from the beginning of the song through the bridge are equally iconic. From solemn-sounding chords in the beginning, to the slightly overdriven and nearly reverb-free compressed sound of the chorus, to that chorused sound in the refrain where it goes from A major to A minor… The song has everything.

— **HELEN IBE**

"One of the things I love most about John is his ability to fill up so much sound with so much simplicity. His parts leave room for the bass and drums to do their thing, but they outline the harmony. The hooks are always catchy, and they fill up just the right amount of space while leaving enough for the imagination to fill in some of the blanks. A lot of the riffs are just so hooky — all the parts are so cool in the way they interact. But it's not like he's playing huge chords to fill things out; he's playing things that are actually a little more simple, with fewer notes than what a lot of other people would play. That plays into the technical and theoretical way he approaches things. He plays things that feel very catchy, interacting and weaving between the bass and the drums but also able to stand on their own."

— **CORY WONG**

"When I started playing guitar, Californication was the biggest album in the world. I was immediately struck by John Frusciante's slinky, funky, effortless style of riffing and soloing — often imitated, never duplicated."

— **NITA STRAUSS**

"Frusciante's playing on 'Hey' from Stadium Arcadium is impeccable. His clean guitar part creates this innocence that matches not only the vocal melody, but the tone of the overall piece. It creates this vibe to truly ride alongside the lyrics that Kiedis sings — all adding up to a guitar solo that can bring a man to his knees."

— **JOSH KENNEDY (THE BLACK MOODS)**

"The version of 'Don't Forget Me' from La Cigale feels like the entire band working at a fluidity you only find from people connecting to a moving force that's beyond all of them. The way John is playing here feels otherworldly. I'd think that even he would say he was connected to something beyond our human comprehension, where you get entirely lost in the music that's happening at that moment. There's no

way to force that state of mind for a musician or creative person; you have to just show up and hope it comes to visit you. Clearly, on this night John was met."
— **BRIAN FALLON (SOLO, THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM)**

"John Frusciante is a master of riffs that are imaginative, interesting, yet totally in service of the song. And his sense of time and groove give an understated effortlessness. One of my favorite riffs is on 'Snow (Hey, Oh)'; he takes a straightforward chord progression yet makes it so engaging, so musical, by choosing cool voicings, great articulation and well-placed slurs and dynamics."
— **GRETCHEN MENN**

"There's a song called 'Don't Forget Me' — I swear, the solo is only three notes played over and over again. At the time, I felt like I had to play really fast because the best players were doing all these amazing arpeggios. So that was the song that made me understand that the right three notes can affect you way more than anything for the sake of speed or technicality. I've seen some pictures of his rig, and it's unreal. The guy has so many pedals on different boards, so he's probably to blame for my love for that as well!"
— **JOE LANGRIDGE-BROWN (NOTHING BUT THIEVES)**

"I love John Frusciante's top lines in relation to the rhythm guitar and bass. Every note feels like it's where it's supposed to be, but every choice he makes still catches me off guard. The perfectly placed hammer-on in every riff trickled into my playing early on. And the way he can create so much tension with only one or two strings over a bass line — like the solos in 'Scar Tissue.' Moments like that have always made me feel better about keeping it simple."
— **DOMINIC FIKE**

"'Pretty Little Ditty' was a clear indicator of what was to come from John. I saw him on MTV, then on the Mother's Milk tour when I was 16. Being a Funkadelic fan, his playing spoke to my aesthetic as a guitarist. Plus he just looked really fucking cool. He was just old enough for me to still kinda idolize, but young enough that I could also relate to him and even think that playing to a sold-out room of 1,200 or so people might be possible for me, too."
— **STEVE SELVIDGE (THE HOLD STEADY)**

LOVE STORIES

RHCP'S JOHN FRUSCIANTE ON THE WRITING & RECORDING OF FIVE STANDOUT *UNLIMITED LOVE* TRACKS, GEAR AND ALL

By RICHARD BIENSTOCK

"Black Summer"

"THROUGH ALL THE time that I wasn't in the Red Hot Chili Peppers, there were only a few years that I was even using guitar in my music. But I kept on practicing, because practicing is something I do to stimulate the brain in interesting ways. I still hadn't written any songs, though. But now the possibility of me rejoining the band came into the air when Flea started talking to me about it, and so I picked up my guitar and I went, 'Hmmm… I wonder if I can still write a rock song?' Because my whole sense of melody had switched to a completely different vocabulary.

"My memory of it is that I picked up my guitar and 'Black Summer' came out. I wrote the initial idea for the verse and the chorus. I had a verse and chorus melody, too, but Anthony made up his own melody for the chorus and only used my melody that I had for the verse. And the thing he did in the chorus is way better than what I did originally.

"One thing I'm very into is chord changes, where the chords are almost like a melody, and they're not dependent on the bass line moving with them. The changes and the little modulation things that take place in 'Black Summer,' the fact that there's an A major chord in the chord progression in the verse, but then there's an A minor chord in the next line, simple little things like that are the kind of things that I find interesting. Or having there be an E major chord in the chorus, but in the verses, the E chords are minor. These are the kind of little mental exercises that make writing chord changes fun for me. And it's visceral. It's not like I'm thinking, 'Wouldn't that be cute if I switched the major to a minor?' It's just that this is what moves me. And I also think it keeps a song moving in a way that makes unexpected feelings come up. Even if you're a non-musician, when that moment happens, a shift in your emotional reaction takes place."

"Veronica"

"FLEA AND I, we've always done these things called 'faceoffs.' If we've been jamming and maybe we've got a good verse that we came up with, but it needs another section, in the old days we used to literally put our foreheads next to each other and give each other kind of a mean look. And then it would be, 'Okay, I'll go outside. You can stay here.' We'd go in separate rooms, and I'd write a section and Flea would write a section. We'd both attempt to write a chorus or a bridge or whatever it was, and then we'd come back into the room and one guy would play everybody his part, the other guy plays everybody his part, and one of them makes it into the song. Or sometimes both of them made it into the song.

"Late in the tracking process we were doing that for a song I'd come up with that's actually not on this record. We did a faceoff for the chorus, and the part I came in with, Rick and Anthony both immediately said, 'That's gotta be its own song!' And so I went into my bedroom that night with that part and I was just like, 'What are we missing?' 'What don't we have in any of these songs?'

And what I came up with was tempo changes. I'm a big fan of tempo changes. It's one of my favorite things about Black Sabbath — their first four records have all these tempo changes that take place within the same song. Another example would be 'Some Velvet Morning' by Lee Hazlewood and Nancy Sinatra or 'We Can Work It Out' by the Beatles. I thought, 'That's something we don't have on any of our songs — a chorus that's a completely different feel and tempo than the verse. And that became the object of 'Veronica.' The verse is in 4/4, but the chorus has a triplet feel.

"Another thing about the song is that *wawawawow* kind of filter effect in the verse. Some people probably think it's a guitar effect, but it's actually my modular synthesizer. And we did all these backwards reverb treatments, sometimes on one instrument, but sometimes on the whole band, to make those tempo changes seem even more fluid. My ear is always looking for things like that — how can we make the recording more colorful without compromising the rawness of it?"

"The Heavy Wing"

"THERE WAS SOME song, it was either by Syd Barrett or the Move, where it was a really great song and the chords were E major, D major and A major. And I thought, 'Those chords can be so powerful. I should write something with those chords.' But I also thought, 'Let's start with those chords and then see what other realms I can take it to.'

"I started the song with just a simple funk riff. Because of my obsession with breakbeats and electronic music, I listen to a lot of funk music from the late Sixties and early Seventies. And so I thought, 'I'll start out with a riff that sounds like you could be getting into a funk song, but then it'll go into this psychedelic world.'

"The guitar in the verse is treated with the modular synth, just to give it some subtle sonic movement. And in the breakdown before the solo, you hear the same guitar playing the same part as in the intro to the song, but being sent through a more pronounced modular treatment. There's also a modular treatment on the guitar in the last four bars of the solo on 'Black Summer' — very subtle, but stereo — and it made a big difference. These are just more examples of my using the synth rather than guitar pedals.

"For the guitar solo, I had my '62 Strat, which has been my main guitar since I rejoined the band the first time, for *Californication*, and I was playing it really loud through all four cabinets of my Marshall. Like, so loud that I had to wear headphones or I would blow my ear off. I was in a pretty big room, so I had really good range to be able to stand at different distances and move around while I was playing to get different kinds of feedback from different places.

"There's a point in the solo where I'm feeding back and bending a couple of notes back and forth, and then it goes to a higher octave, and then it goes to two octaves higher than that. It almost sounds like the kind of screeching feedback that people try to avoid, but you still hear that I'm bending the notes the same way I was when the feedback started. I didn't plan that. I had no idea that those notes were going to happen. But when something like that happens, all you can do is just hold it and hope you don't lose it. I really like that aspect of soloing — not so much planning something out and being like, 'All right, here we go,' but more just listening as you're doing it, and then responding to what you're listening to."

"The Great Apes"

" 'THE GREAT APES' was something Flea brought in. In the chorus, the guitar part I play is just what his bass line brought out of me. It's definitely a Fugazi-inspired thing. The fact that I'm picking fast, but playing a melody that's kind of a slow melody, that feeling that it expresses is something that I hear in their music a fair amount. At the same time, those slides that happen in the midst of it are very much Johnny Thunders-inspired.

"I'll tell you a little studio trick that we did on this one, because it sounds like I'm doing something more amazing than I actually am. At the outro, Flea and I do this switch. For most of the song, during the chorus I'm playing the melody we've been talking about and Flea's playing the chord changes. But when it goes to the outro, I'm playing Flea's chord changes and he's playing my melody. And somehow it sounds more bass-y, by the way, when I start playing the chord changes!

"Another thing about the outro: I'm playing those chord changes at the end, but then in the last few bars of the song I go back to soloing. I had two guitars — I'm pretty sure it was my Stratocaster through a distortion pedal on one side and a Yamaha SG 2000 straight into a Marshall on the other, and I would double them for that Black Sabbath-type of power. But I started soloing so fast that I couldn't double it. I tried, but it was way too fast. And so we did an artificial double for that, with delay and some tape speed manipulation. The tape is just slightly moving, so the parts are not exactly the same. Because when you double something, that little difference in the parts is what gives it that power. So what you're hearing gives the impression that I actually played the same thing twice, even though in this case I didn't."

"Tangelo"

"WE WERE TOWARD the end of the writing process, and I was thinking in terms of, 'Okay, what styles are we missing?' Because for a while we had a lot of funk and we had a lot of fun music, but it seemed like we were kind of light on heavy stuff. And so that's when I was bringing in 'The Heavy Wing' and some other ones. But I also realized we were missing very soft, gentle things as well. And so I wrote 'Tangelo' just to fill up that space. I figured I'd write a fingerpicking thing for acoustic guitar. And again, it was one of those things where I had a melody, and what Anthony did with it was inspired by my melody, but it was also completely different in a lot of ways. He brought it into this almost Lou Reed-esque kind of half-talking, half-singing thing, whereas my melody was a very strict kind of melody that followed the chord changes.

"I played the acoustic part on two different guitars. They're both Martins — I don't remember the models, but these are guitars I've had for a long time. One of them is a brown Martin that's kind of small. It's from the Forties or Fifties. And then the other one, it's a Martin from the Sixties that looks like the guitar John Lennon plays in the *Magical Mystery Tour* film. Those guitars are my babies.

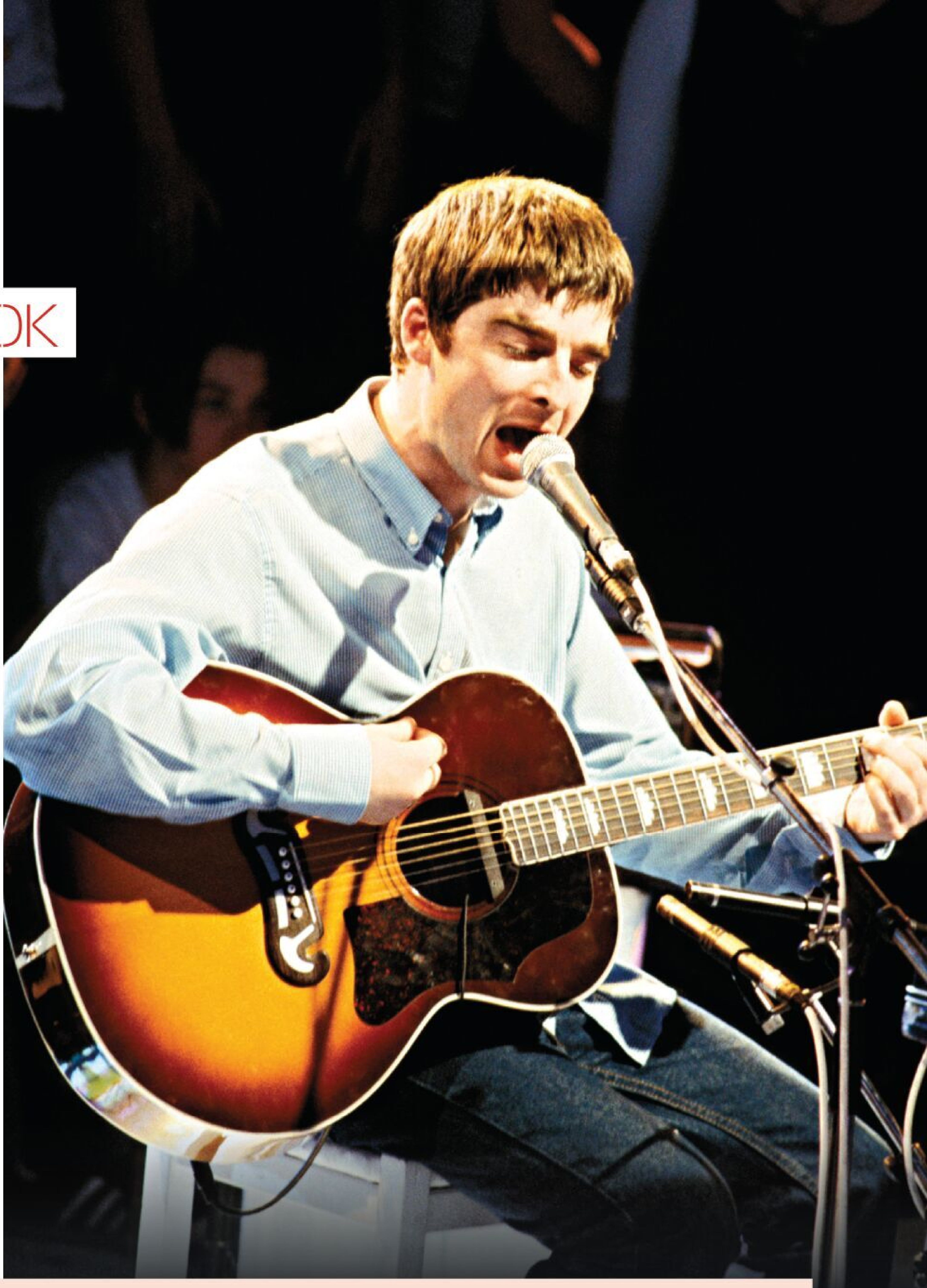
"The overdubs on this one were fun. I remember it was the very last day we were in the recording phase of the album, and I was supposed to be going home that day. I felt like I didn't have anything left inside me. I felt completely drained. And then I thought, 'Let me just try a little thing...' I started with one Mellotron, and then I wound up overdubbing synths and Mellotrons feverishly for, like, three hours, coming up with those parts that start in the second verse and go up until the last verse. It felt like it lifted the song to this other level. And it was really unexpected — I thought I had nothing in me and then I had all that come out of me. It was a really nice way to leave the studio." ag

---

"While John is best known for his work with RHCP, we know him best for his more avant-garde work with the Mars Volta and Omar Rodrígues-Lopez. The Bedlam in Goliath is one of our favorite progressive albums of all time, and the layers of guitar work are incredible. John and Omar's riffs are groovy throughout, with tasty wah solos and dirty stop-box effects pushing the experimental concepts developed through the whole album."
— ZAK & REX COX (UNCURED)

"I was a massive RHCP fan in high school. Hillel Slovak was still alive when I discovered them. It was wild to see the evolution/transformation of the band. I first saw RHCP on the Uplift Mofo tour, just after Hillel passed away. I was in 10th grade. And then I think I saw five or six shows when they were touring Mother's Milk. The difference in those two versions of the band was astounding. John was a guitar hero."
— TAD KUBLER (THE HOLD STEADY)

"John Frusciante really sees music as a great tradition that is passed down and not something that's possessed by individuals. It's a more fluid thing that he's a part of. He studies it and is very disciplined with how he relates to it. He's good at constantly being inspired by different artists and different types of music, pulling from all of these different things when writing. He left RHCP after Blood Sugar Sex Magik and then didn't play guitar for years! When he rejoined the band, his fingers didn't have the same strength that they did before. Instead of feeling defeated and like he wasn't good enough, he directed his attention to guitarists who weren't as flashy but who played more simply and were more about the interaction with the other instruments. He used his limitations as a strength, not a weakness, which is an amazing mindset. Since then he has obviously regained all that strength and has played more like a 'guitar hero,' but the fact that when he couldn't, he still wrote/recorded Californication — that's amazing. I particularly love his playing on 'Hard to Concentrate' — all those different guitar sounds (that don't sound like guitar) are really special. It's hard to choose a favorite, but his playing on 'Dosed' kind of sums up how much emotion he is pulling from the instrument, with all those different parts going at once."
— AARON BRUNO (AWOLNATION)



OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

OASIS
WONDERWALL

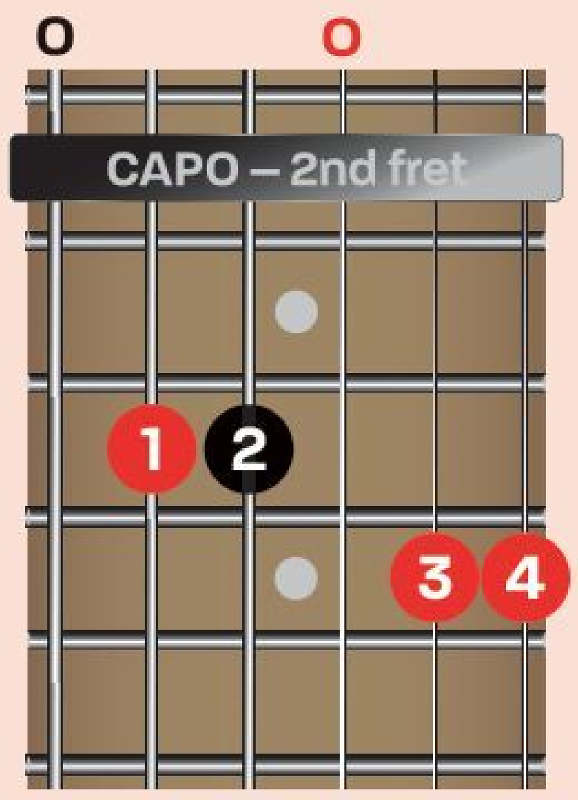
Learn the song Noel Gallagher said Oasis never played right, with TG's tab, chords and a full song sheet…

A huge worldwide hit and Oasis' calling card it may be, but the squabbling Gallagher brothers have long had mixed feelings about Wonderwall. "Every time I have to sing it, I want to gag," Liam exclaimed in 2008. "We've never got it right," Noel said later the same year. "It's too slow or too fast."

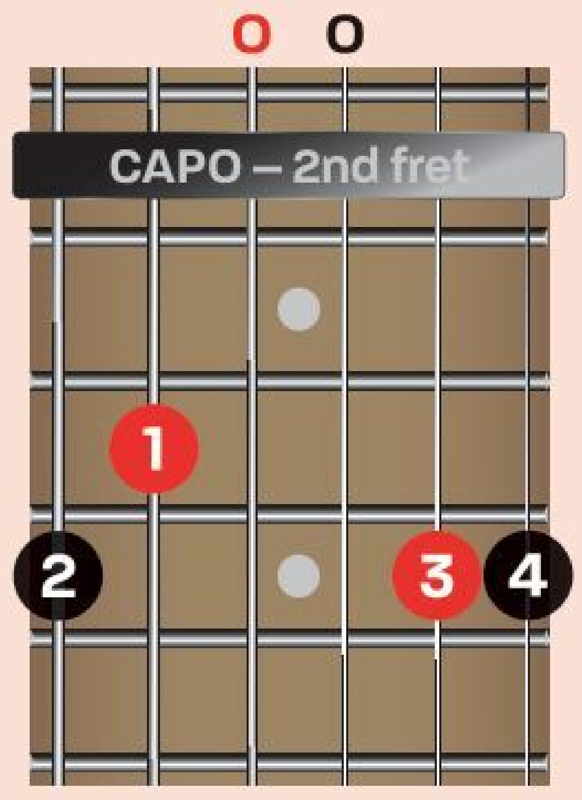
Well, this issue you can get it right! We've tabbed out Noel's acoustic guitar intro for you below. If you can play this section, you've got most of the song down - there are only a couple more chords to learn and the rhythm changes very little throughout. Just remember to use a capo on the 2nd fret to play in key with the original track.

CHORDS

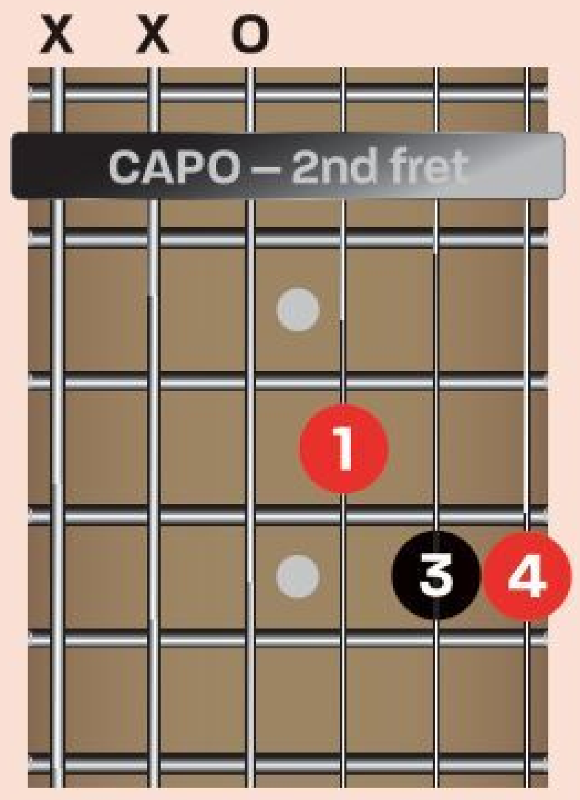
These are easy chords, with your third and fourth fingers staying in one spot while your other digits move from fret to fret. You'll need to use a capo at the 2nd fret to play along with the original recording (and our backing track). Not difficult in itself, but it does make the chord names a little confusing. Notice each chord has two names: first is the actual pitch created with the capo on the neck, and second (shown in brackets) is the name of the shape if you were playing it without capo.



F#m7
(Em7)

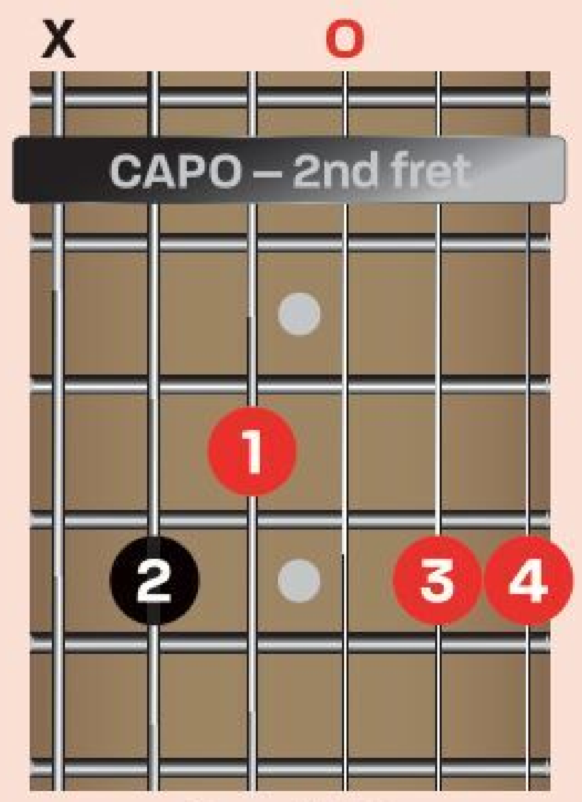


A
(G)



Esus4
(Dsus4)

B7sus4
(A7sus4)



Dadd9
(Cadd9)

A/G#
(G/F#)

WONDERWALL
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Guitars and backing James Uings Photo Getty

Songsheet

Wonderwall

Intro
F#m7 A Esus4 B7sus4 x4

Verse 1
F#m7 A
Today is gonna be the day
Esus4 B7sus4
That they're gonna throw it back to you
F#m7 A
By now you should've somehow
Esus4 B7sus4
Realised what you gotta do
F#m7 A
I don't believe that anybody
Esus4 B7sus4 Dadd9 Esus4 B7sus4
Feels the way I do about you now

Verse 2
F#m7 A
Backbeat, the word is on the street
Esus4 B7sus4
That the fire in your heart is out
F#m7 A
I'm sure you've heard it all before
Esus4 B7sus4
But you never really had a doubt
F#m7 A
I don't believe that anybody
Esus4 B7sus4 F#m7
Feels the way I do about you now

Bridge
F#m7 A Esus4 B7sus4

Pre-chorus 1
Dadd9 Esus4 F#m7
And all the roads we have to walk are winding
Dadd9 Esus4 F#m7
And all the lights that lead us there are blinding
Dadd9 Esus4
There are many things that I
A E/G# F#m7 B7sus4
Would like to say to you but I don't know how

Chorus 1
Dadd9 F#m7 A
Because maybe
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
You're gonna be the one that saves me
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
And after all
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A F#m7
You're my wonderwall

Verse 3
F#m7 A
Today was gonna be the day
Esus4 B7sus4
But they'll never throw it back to you
F#m7 A
By now you should've somehow
Esus4 B7sus4
Realised what you're not to do
F#m7 A
I don't believe that anybody
Esus4 B7sus4 F#m7
Feels the way I do about you now

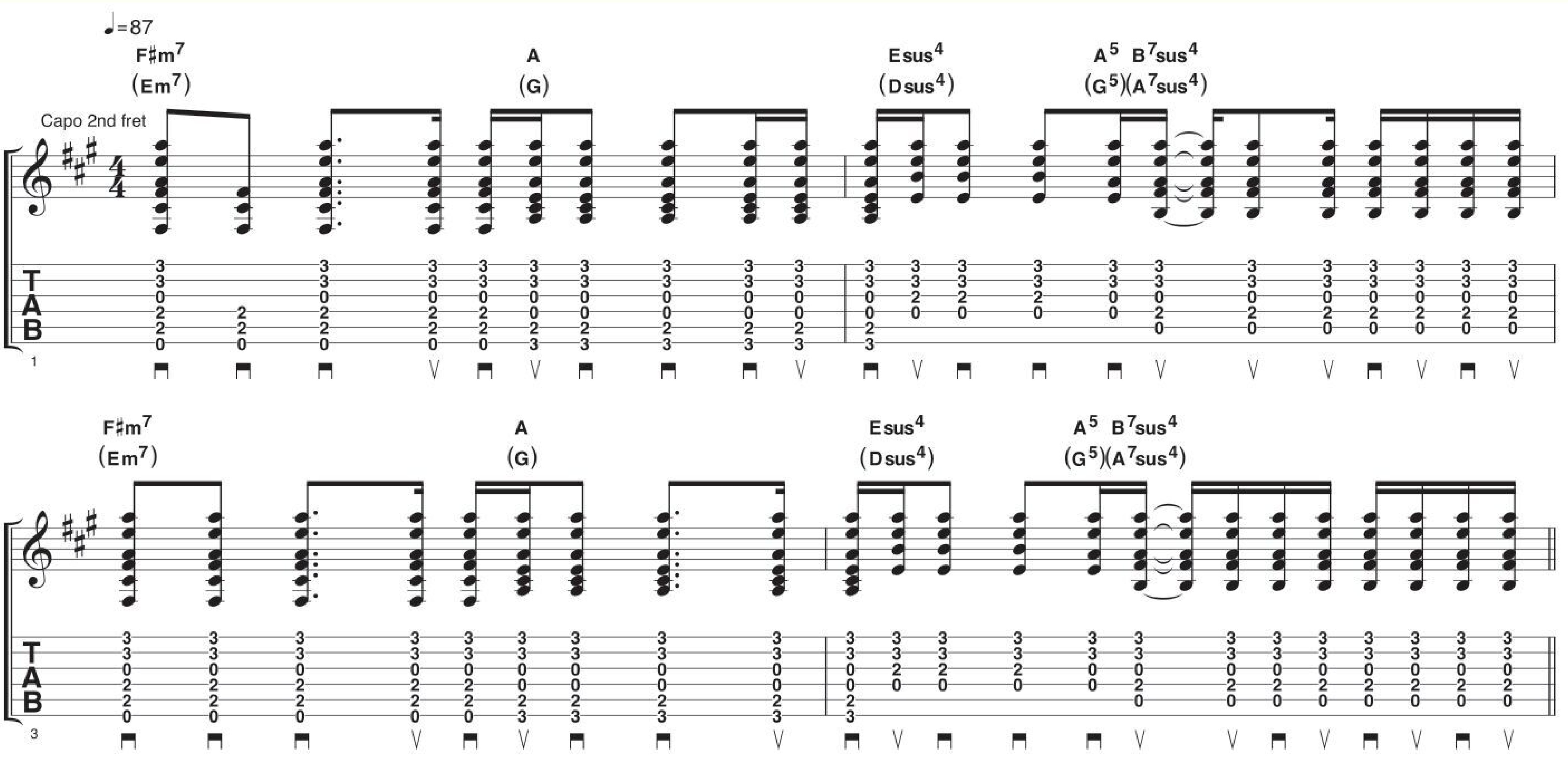
Bridge
F#m7 A Esus4 B7sus4

Pre-chorus 2
Dadd9 Esus4 F#m7
And all the roads that lead you there were winding
Dadd9 Esus4 F#m7
And all the lights that light the way are blinding
Dadd9 Esus4
There are many things that I
A E/G# F#m7 B7sus4
Would like to say to you but I don't know how

Chorus 2
Dadd9 F#m7 A
I said maybe
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
You're gonna be the one that saves me
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
And after all
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A F#m7
You're my wonderwall
Dadd9 F#m7 A
I said maybe
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
You're gonna be the one that saves me
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
And after all
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A F#m7
You're my wonderwall
Dadd9 F#m7 A
I said maybe
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
You're gonna be the one that saves me
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A
You're gonna be the one that saves me
F#m7 Dadd9 F#m7 A F#m7
You're gonna be the one that saves me

Outro
Dadd9 F#m7 A F#m7 x4

OASIS WONDERWALL Intro/Verse



The strumming directions shown under the tab give you the detail here, but the best way to tackle a 16th note strumming pattern like this is to maintain a constant down-up motion, simply avoiding contact with strings to create space where needed.

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

ED SHEERAN AFTERGLOW

This easy four-chord song is perfect for improving your strumming technique and building confidence

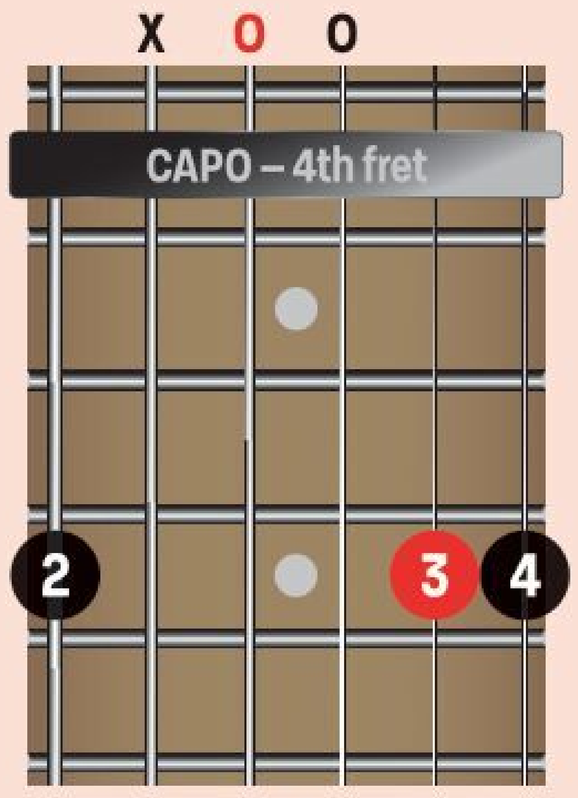
Landing in December 2020, Afterglow is Ed Sheeran's most recent single, and was an immediate hit. 2019's No.6 Collaborations Project was a predominantly electronic hip hop and R 'n' B affair, but Ed's back on steel-string acoustic here, performing the kind of folky pop that first made him famous a decade ago.

You need but four easy open shapes to play along. Just remember to pop a capo on the 4th fret so you're in the original key. Never used a capo? We'd urge you to pick one up! It's on the 4th fret here, so you can move it up or down the fretboard to suit the pitch of your singing voice.

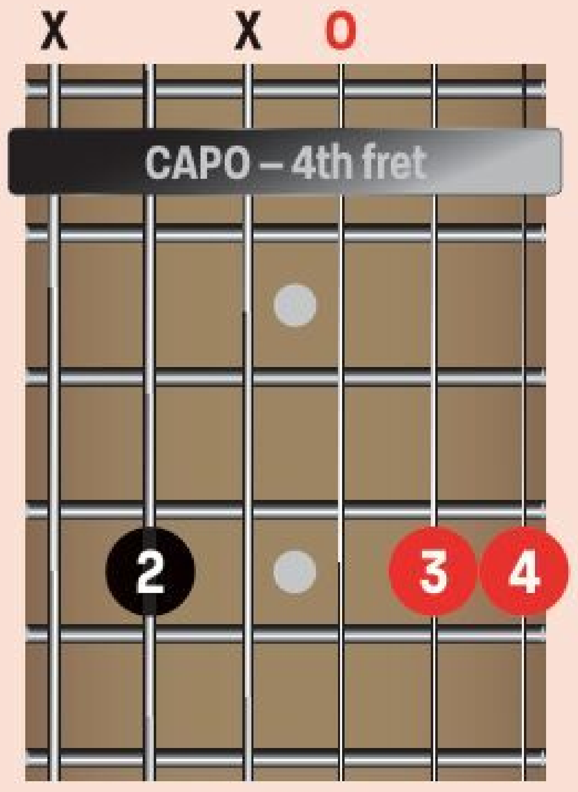
Finally, take note of Ed's solid rhythm technique. Afterglow is a bare bones song that relies on your strumming arm to deliver the driving eighth-note feel. If it goes wrong, you can't blame the drummer!

CHORDS

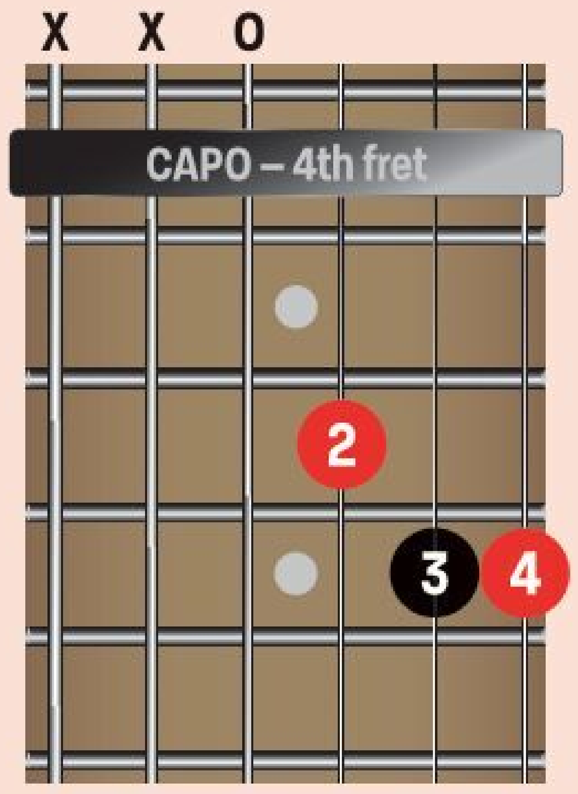
Afterglow is proof that there's still plenty of life left in those Wonderwall chords! The trick with these shapes is to remember to keep your third and fourth fingers rooted on the top strings throughout, moving only your first or second fingers on chord changes. By angling your second finger so that it just touches the string above you can easily mute out the idle 'inner' string (marked X) in the B5 and Esus2 chords.



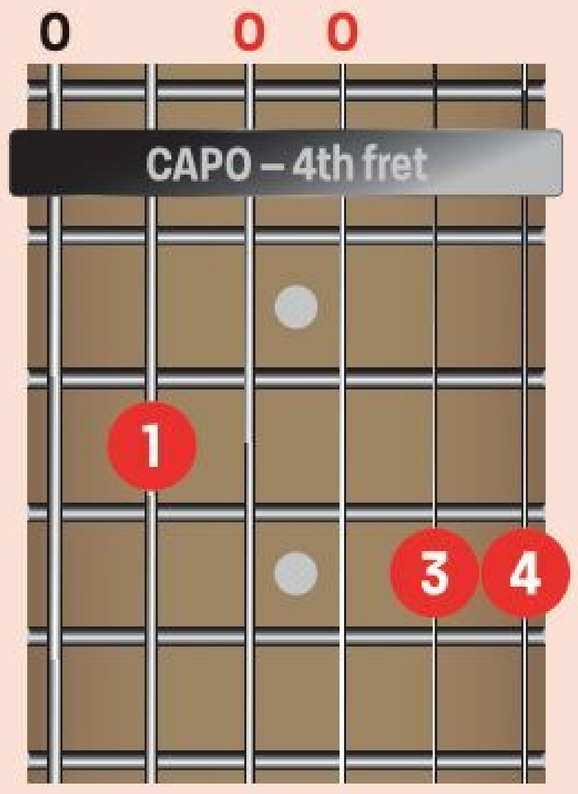
B5
(G5)



Esus2
(Csus2)



F#sus4
(Dsus4)



G#m7
(Em7)

AFTERGLOW
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Guitars and backing: Phil Capone Photo: Getty

Songsheet

Afterglow

Verse 1

B5
Stop the clocks, it's amazing
Esus2
You should see the way the light

Dances off your head
F#sus4 G#m7
A million colours of hazel
Esus2
Golden and red
B5
Saturday morning is fading
Esus2
The sun's reflected by the coffee

In your hand
F#sus4 G#m7
My eyes are caught in your gaze
Esus2
All over again

Pre-chorus

Esus2
We were love drunk

Waiting on a miracle
B5
Trying to find ourselves
F#sus4
In the winter snow
Esus2
So alone in love like the world
B5 F#sus4
had disappeared
Esus2
Oh, I won't be silent and I won't let go
B5 F#sus4
I will hold on tighter 'til the afterglow
Esus2
And we'll burn so bright
B5
F#sus4
'Til the darkness softly clears

Chorus 1

Esus2
Oh, I will hold on
B5 F#sus4
To the afterglow
Esus2
Oh, I will hold on
B5
To the afterglow

Verse 2

B5
The weather outside's changing
Esus2
The leaves are buried
Under six inches of white
F#sus4 G#m7 Esus2
The radio is playing Iron & Wine
B5
This is a new dimension
Esus2
This is a level where we're losing

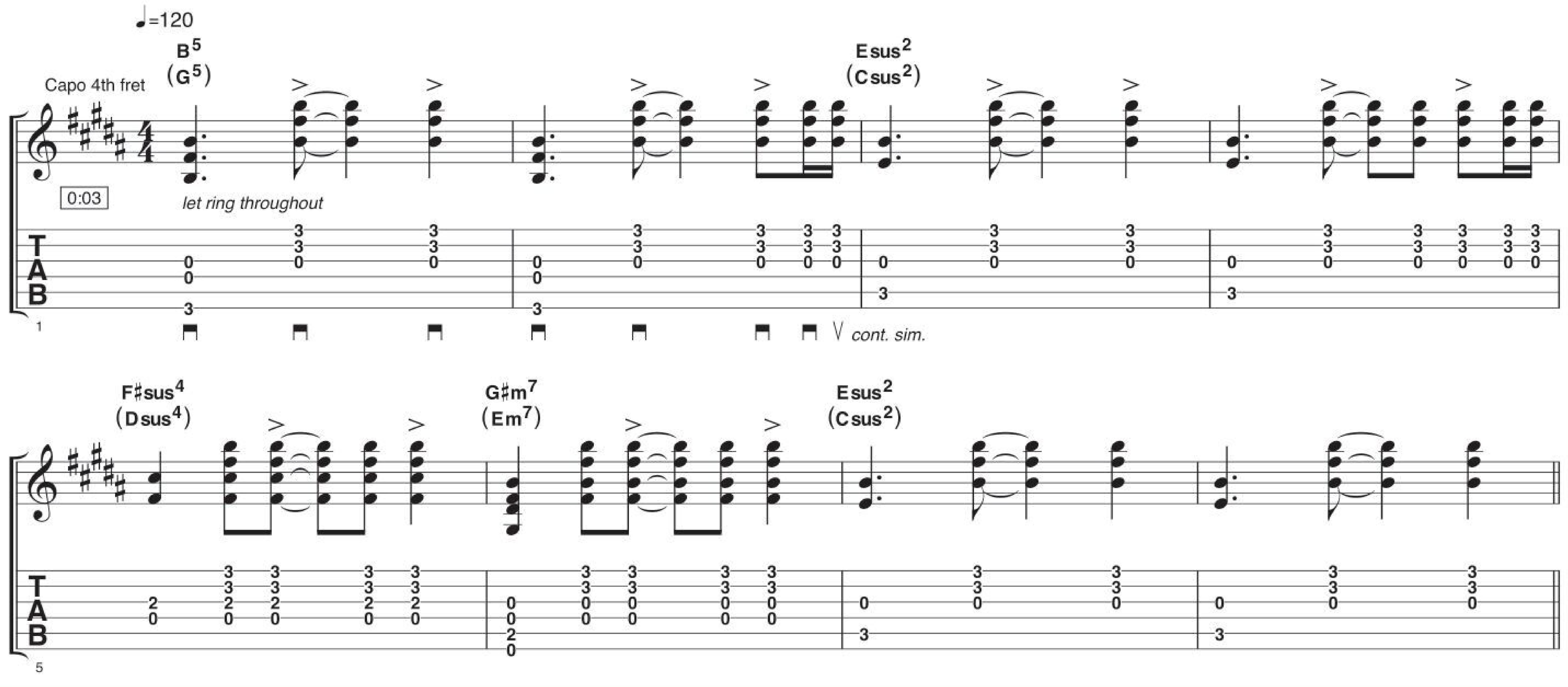
track of time
F#sus4 G#m7
I'm holding nothing against it
Esus2
Except you and I

Repeat Pre-chorus

Chorus 2

Esus2
Oh, I will hold on
B5 F#sus4
To the afterglow
Esus2
Oh, I will hold on
B5 F#sus4
To the afterglow
Esus2 N.C.
Oh, I will hold on to the afterglow

ED SHEERAN AFTERGLOW Verse



Ed Sheeran strums with his thumb and first finger, giving the part a natural, organic feel. Whether you use a pick or your fingers, fret the full shapes and pick out the notes shown in the tab. You don't have to be super-accurate to be effective. Strum as indicated. This means you'll only use upstrokes at the end of bars 2 and 4.

LESSONS IN FUNK

Flex your funk muscles with this groove masterclass as we examine Chilis-style funk-rock, contemporary neo-soul, jazz-fusion and more...

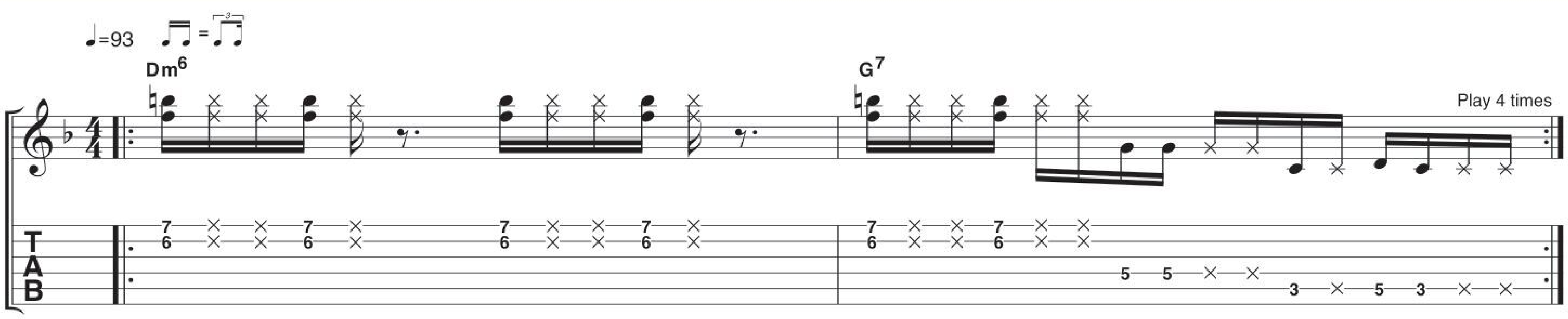
Guitars and backing Steve Allsworth

Although funk can be traced back to the early days of James Brown, like all styles, it has evolved a lot over the last 60 years. With an increasing body of great rhythm guitar players on the live circuit as well as well as online, there's never been a greater abundance of talent and innovation, that's constantly pushing stylistic boundaries.

Within this evolution, funk has crossed over into other styles such as RnB, neo-soul, fusion, gospel, and many more guitarists are becoming switched on to the beauty of using a clean sound and really working on rhythm and harmony. At its heart, classic funk is all about syncopation, space and generally static/simple chords. The crossover into neo-soul and gospel largely retains this element of syncopation and rhythm but tends to use more extended and colourful harmony.

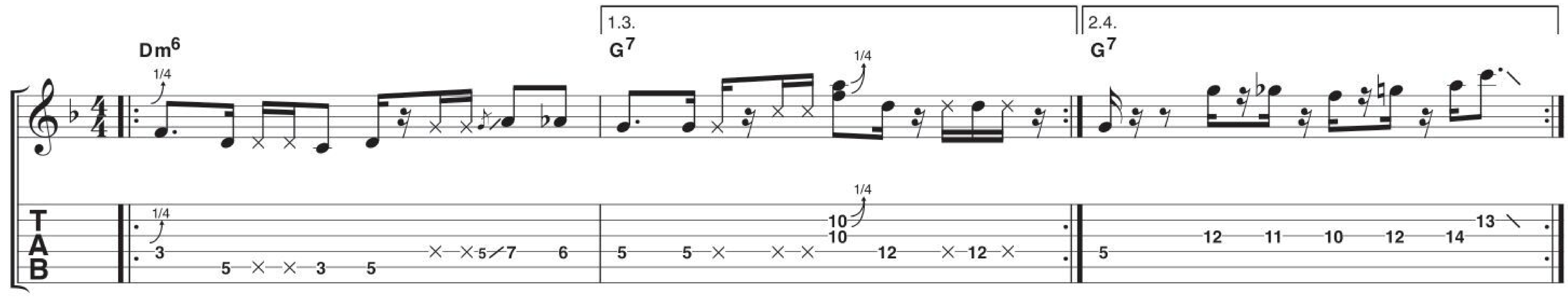
You'll also find many of the guitarists featured here, ranging from Frusciante through to Lettieri, frequently use fingerstyle technique to bring in slaps/pops borrowed from classic funk bass technique, together with wider intervals and greater control over chord shapes.

1 JOHN FRUSCIANTE FUNK #1



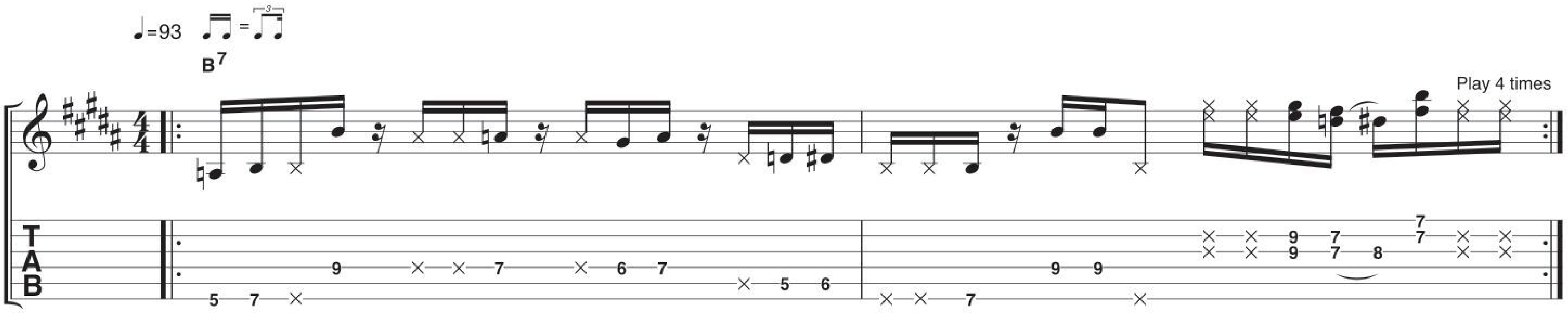
When many people think of funk, they often turn to this 90s-inspired Frusciante style rhythm. This small partial chord is inherently funky because of the space, fret-hand mutes and swing feel. It's all about how it interacts with the bassline, so notice how we're not filling the bar with endless fret-hand muting. In this case, less is more.

2 JOHN FRUSCIANTE FUNK #2



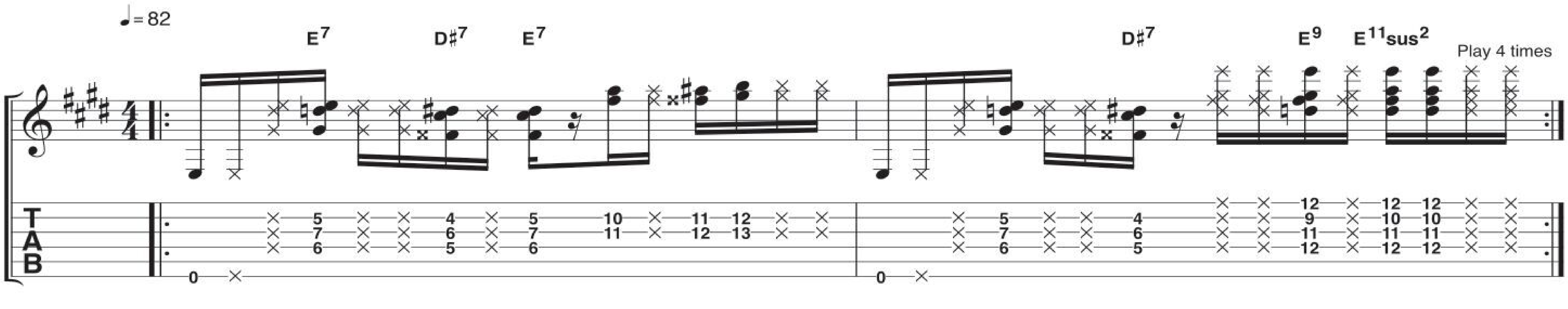
Just like the classic James Brown blueprint of having two interlocking guitar parts, this D minor pentatonic idea is designed to 'fill in the cracks' of our previous guitar part. John is a master of string muting, especially when fretting single notes while strumming through all the strings. Once you've mastered this technique, you'll have the freedom in the picking hand to improvise any rhythm you like.

3 ERIC KRASNO FUNK



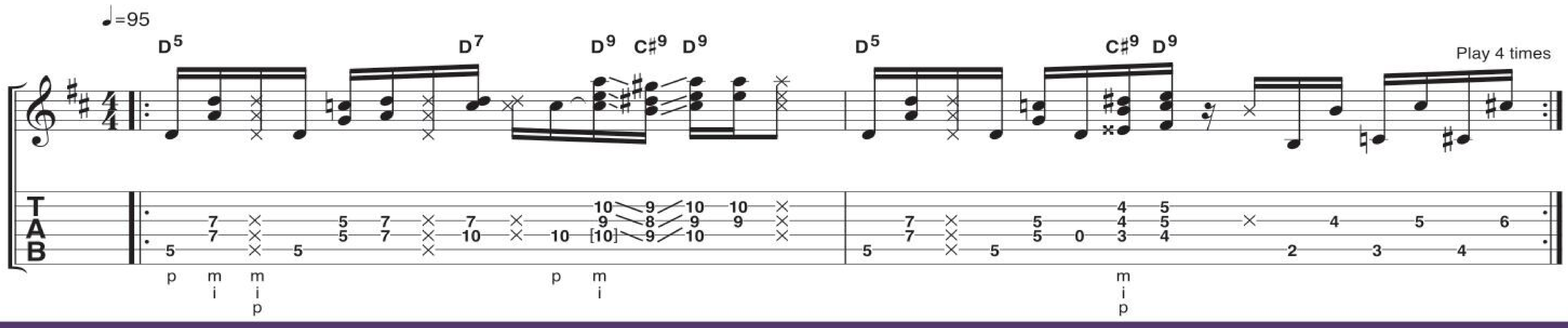
As part of jazz-funk outfit Lettuce, Krasno's style often mirrors the sparse single-note lines of James Brown's most famous guitarist Jimmy Nolen. Try to view our example riff through the lens of the B7 chord shape at the 7th fret and you should be able to see the connection between classic blues lines that target pentatonic ideas within the shape. Aim to keep your pick hand moving at all times, but try to avoid constant fret-hand mutes.

4 CORY WONG FUNK



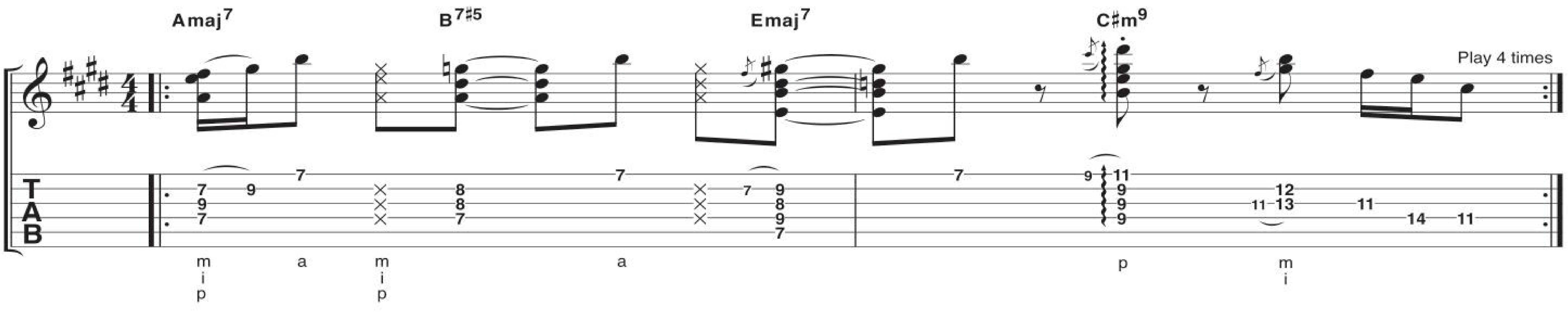
Cory's signature sound is position 4 on a Strat together with a dash of compression to make those funky lines pop. He has a particularly rubbery pick hand wrist, so the key to this riff is constant pick hand motion coming from the wrist rather than the arm. This riff is also a great lesson in how to get the most from a humble E7 chord, with Cory's trademark melodic variations up and down the neck.

5 SNARKY PUPPY FINGERSTYLE



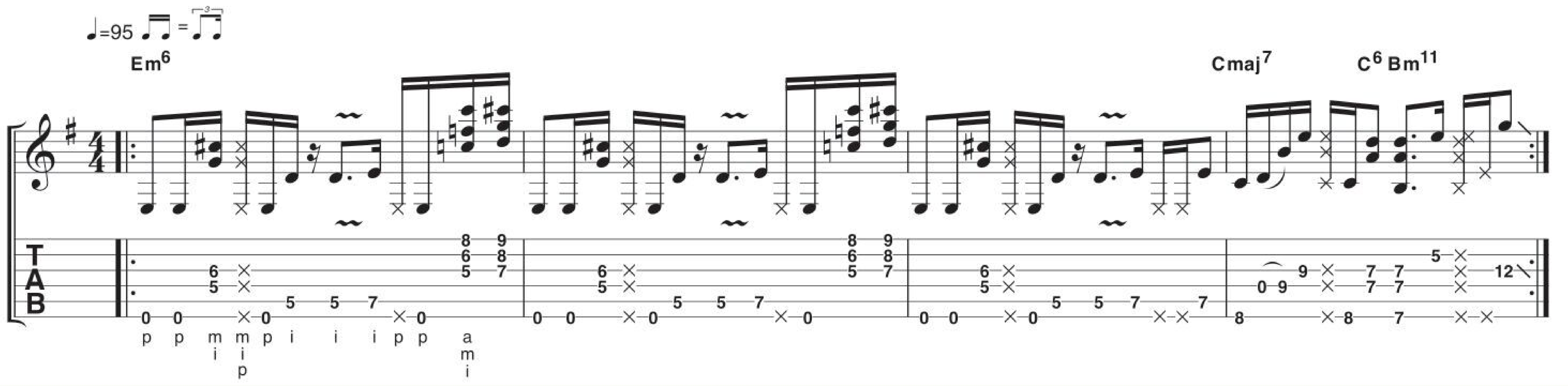
Snarky Puppy's Mark Lettieri is a great fingerstyle specialist. Here the thumb, index and middle fingers can be used for percussive effects as well as playing chords/notes. Beat 2 is a great example of the 'keeping time' percussive technique. This offbeat 'mini slap' comes from pivoting the pick hand at the wrist, away from the strings and back to rest on the strings.

6 MARK LETTIERI NEO-SOUL



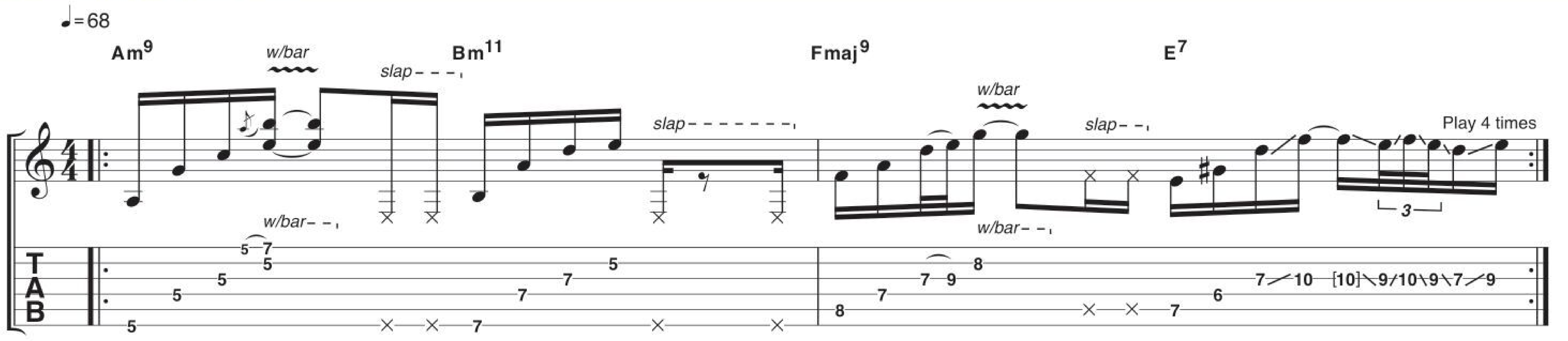
Here, as we delve into gospel-tinged neo-soul, we start to hear complex chord extensions such as the 9th and #5th for added tension. Much of the gospel/neo-soul stylistic vibe of this riff comes from the quick hammer-ons on chords. As with our previous Lettieri-inspired riff, fingers work best, as you can get some great separation between notes in the chords. You can also try raking through chords with the thumb (as with the C#m9 chord).

7 MATEUS ASATO FUNK



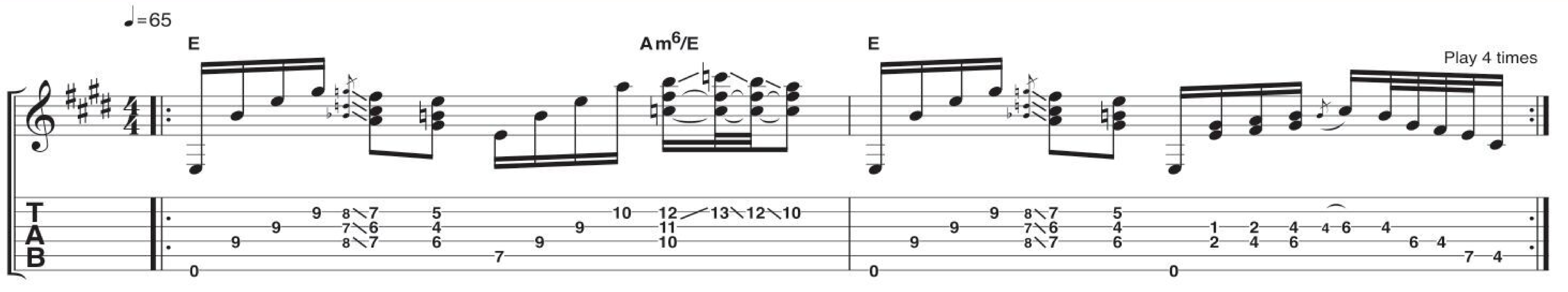
This Mateus Asato inspired riff is a natural development of Mark Lettieri's fingerstyle approach, but here we're also incorporating a similar funk chord shape to our Frusciante ideas. Again, the pick hand 'keeps time' by slapping/coming to a rest on the strings on every backbeat (beats 2 and 4). The final bar is a great example of how Mateus uses slick hammer-ons/legato as a rhythmic/percussive device.

8 MELANIE FAYE NEO-SOUL



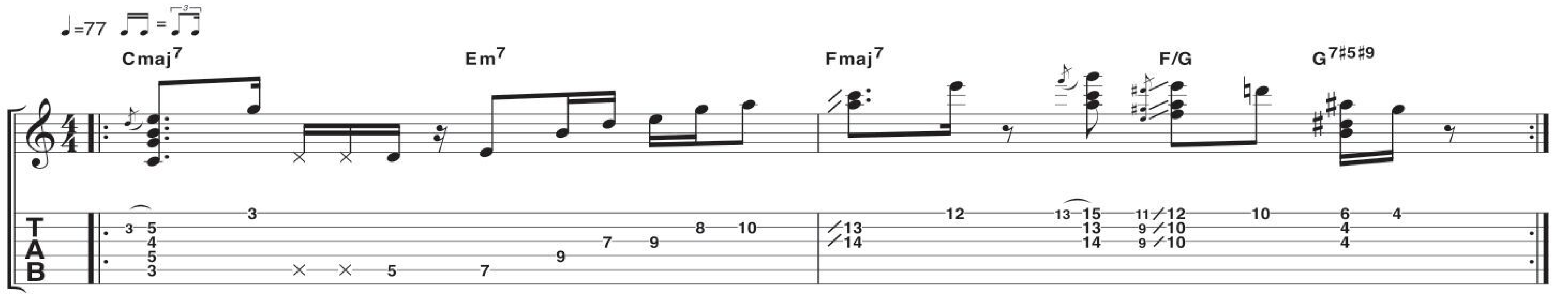
The use of the whammy bar is a great way to add a lyrical/vocal-like quality to your extended chords, and this is a feature heard a lot in contemporary neo-soul. Try to be subtle however, so you only need to use the ring and pinky finger to apply a gentle vibrato to the bar. The quick slide/legato manoeuvre that many guitarists all the way from Chris Buck to Melanie Faye love to use is a key idea that can add interest to simple single-note melodies.

9 JUSTUS WEST NEO-SOUL



Taking inspiration from Grammy-winning multi-intrumentalist and producer Justus West, here we have a beautiful Am6/E chord that provides harmonic movement from the E major base. Notice how there's an internal melodic idea throughout that almost feels like a crossover from classic jazz. The downward chord slides can be a little tricky to master at first. Here you need to concentrate on getting equal pressure on all your fingers as you slide, so watch out for any fret buzz or muted notes.

10 ISAIAH SHARKEY SOUL/JAZZ



Isaiah tends to play lines on the jazzier side of the street, so alongside classic soul chord ideas and improvised pentatonic lines, you'll also find 'outside' chords such as the G7#5#9. Here, the addition of #5 and #9 intervals provides tension before you move back to the home chord of Cmaj7.

BLUEGRASS ESSENTIALS

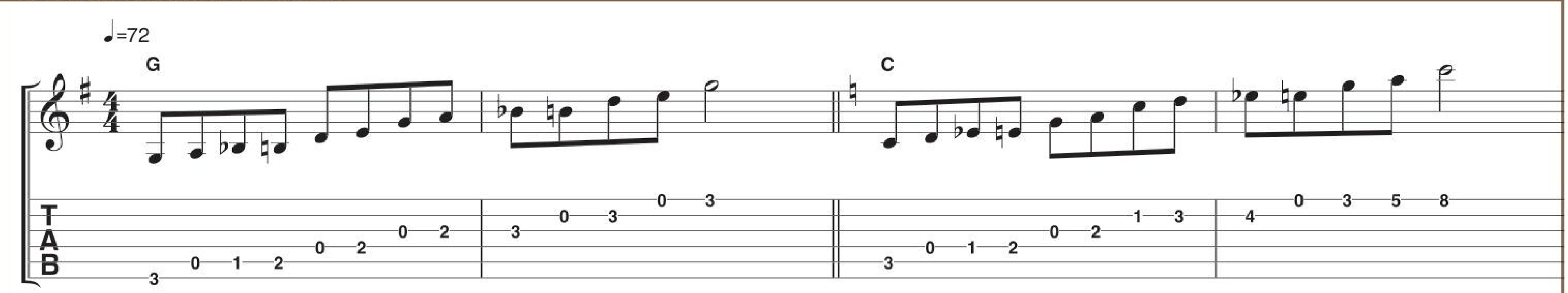
Run for your lives, the banjos are coming! Here is our guide to getting started with bluegrass

One of America's oldest forms of music, bluegrass was once derided as Hillbilly car-chase music dominated by rattling banjos and insane acoustic guitar picking. However, with the huge popularity of a new generation of artists like Molly Tuttle and Billy Strings, the style has been freshened up and guitarists are discovering how much fun bluegrass can be. With that in mind, it's time to get you started with some essential bluegrass basics.

Whilst it can sound like country music to the uninitiated, bluegrass is very much its own style, with unique instrumentation usually made up of vocals, guitar, banjo, upright bass and mandolin, plus resonator guitars often appearing, too. Drumkit accompaniment isn't so common – bluegrass players lock in with great timing and thinking percussively is a key element of the genre.

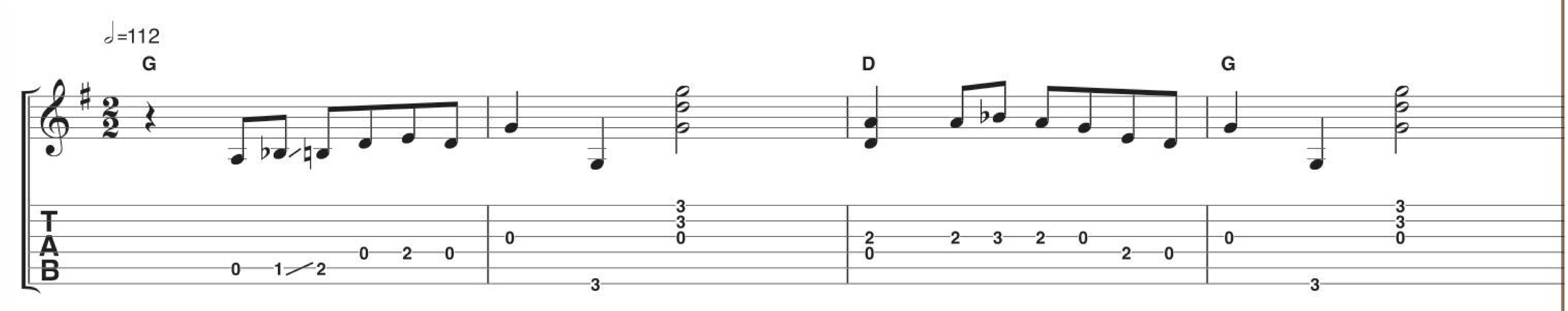
The following examples will introduce some of the basic concepts from scale choices to rhythm and blazing licks.

ESSENTIAL BLUEGRASS SCALE



Bluegrass players really get the style in place by learning classic repertoire, but knowing some suitable scales is a frustration-free way to get the sound too. Here is the major blues scale starting from G and then C. This scale forms the basis of many classic licks.

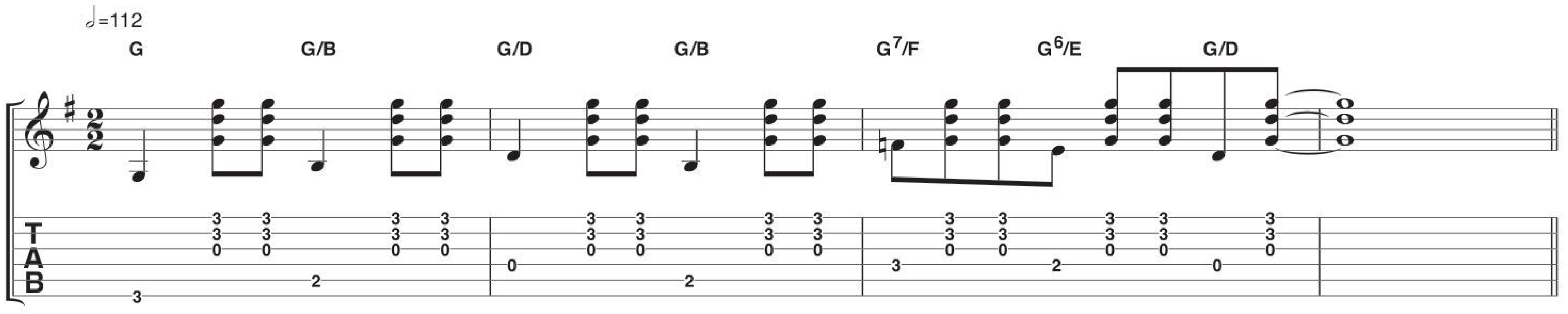
MAJOR BLUES SCALE LICK



Here's a classic bluegrass lick showing the G major blues scale in action. In bar 1, notice the slide from the minor 3rd (B flat) to the major 3rd (B) over a G root chord – this movement is integral to bluegrass. Also, note how the G chord is broken up with a bass note/chord approach in bars 2 and 4.

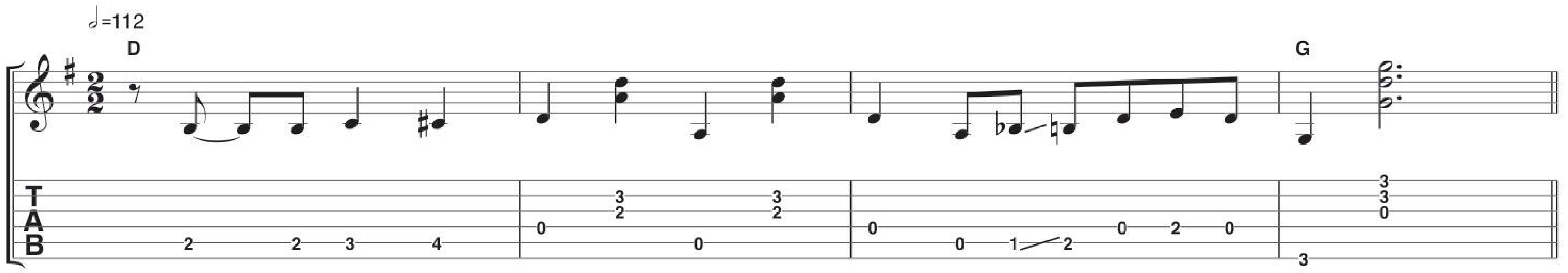
Guitars & backing Stuart Ryan

BASS AND CHORD GROOVE



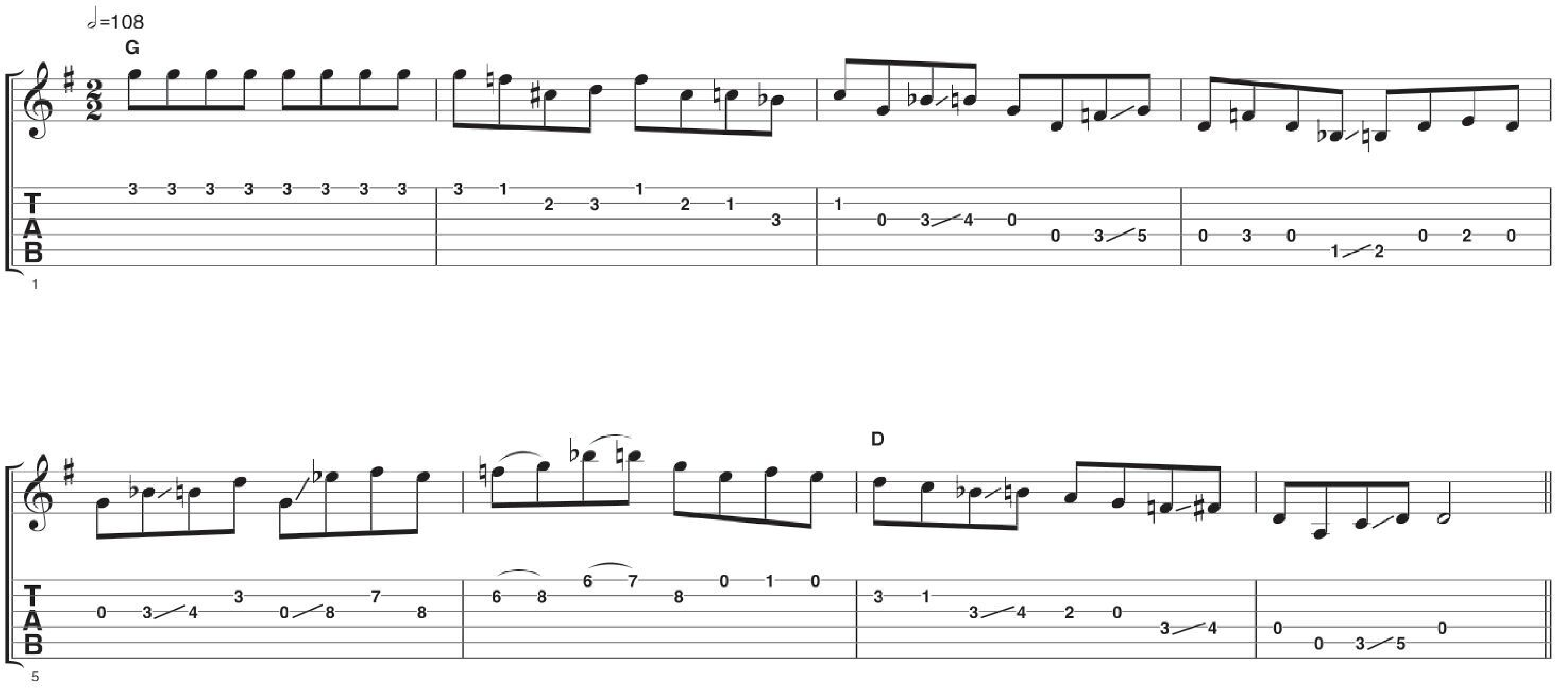
All the greatest bluegrass players are masters of rhythm – providing a backing for other instruments is a big part of the style. A typical approach breaks a chord up with a bass note/chord strum pattern. Infinite variations of this exist, but playing across the strings is the main focus.

TURNAROUND LICK



Here's a common turnaround sequence from the V chord (D) to the I chord (G). This example has also been used as an intro countless times and, as with other styles, you need to learn some well-used licks, patterns and sequences so you can start to sound authentic.

GUITAR SOLO LICK



This lick is inspired by bluegrass prodigy Billy Strings. There's no getting away from it, rapid-fire alternate picking in the open position is at the core of his style. Both fret hand and pick hand need to be in perfect time with each other, so make sure to practise our lick slowly, breaking it down phrase by phrase.

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Words Amit Sharma

“We love making weird noises with our guitars!”

Masters of the seven-string, architects of nu-metal, Korn guitarists Munky and Head are still finding new ways to play heavy...

When we think of the innovators who shaped heavy music through the decades, Korn deserve recognition alongside more obvious names such as Iron Maiden, Metallica and Soundgarden. Formed in Bakersfield, California, Korn were, after all, the first metal group to popularise seven-string guitars – the band’s two guitarists, James ‘Munky’ Schaffer and Brian ‘Head’ Welch, using the subsonic weight of the added B string to explore new uncharted tonal depths, thus inspiring players from bands such as Fear Factory and Meshuggah to follow suit and embrace a whole new world of low-end.

Korn’s self-titled debut album, released in 1994, was a true game-changer - its mix of heavy riffs and hip-hop rhythms shaping the sound of nu-metal and influencing genera-

tions of bands from Slipknot and Linkin Park to rising stars of today such as Tetrarch and Cane Hill. That signature sound is still very much in evidence on the new Korn album *Requiem* - the 14th studio recording of the band's long career. The music is thunderously heavy and brilliantly melodic, with Munky and Head whipping up a seven-string storm. And now, when these guys look back on how it all started, they acknowledge the influence of one guitarist in particular.

It was super-shredder Steve Vai who helped develop the seven-string with Japanese guitar giants Ibanez in the 80s. And for Munky, a teenager back then, Vai was a hero.

"After reading interviews with Vai, I learned how he could map out what someone was saying with his instrument," Munky says now, citing Vai's intro to David Lee Roth's *Yankee Rose* - in essence, a 'conversation' between Roth's voice and Vai's guitar - as the mark of a musician wholeheartedly in tune with his instrument. "Vai could match the tonality of the human voice, using the same rhythms and lines to tell a story. I remember my mother telling me off when I was young, saying, 'You play the guitar more than you talk to us!'

"But she also pointed out that it was my true voice. I thought about this later on in life and realised she was right – anything I try to say with my voice, I can say through my guitar. Whether it's happy or sad, whatever I'm feeling can come through the guitar and out of a speaker. It was empowering. It helped me realise my purpose."

He continues: "What I learned from Steve Vai – and I'm still learning from him because he's amazing – was how he embodies the feeling he wants to transcend through his instrument. That's something I really took from him. What do I want the listener to feel? Is it pure aggression or something purely melodic? He helped me kick that door open."

Head tells the story of how Munky's fixation on Vai led inevitably to the seven-string. "I was a Vai fan too," he says, "but Munky was obsessed and followed everything he did. When he found out about the seven-string, he went to Guitar Center and was like, 'I need this!' He'd work little odd jobs to save up, getting fifty to a hundred dollars a week. After a few months, he had enough money, but even in the meantime he was always in that store playing the guitar, telling us it was his before he'd even bought it."

The day the young James Schaffer took that guitar home was unquestionably life-changing. The seven-string would become fundamental to Korn's signature sound, allowing them to go lower, harder and deeper than any band that had come before them and help create the blueprint for what would soon become known as 'nu-metal'. As Head says: "Steve Vai may have invented that guitar, but Munky had the vision for using it in heavy music."

The combination of the seven-strings, the hip-hop-inspired rhythms of bassist Fieldy and drummer David Silveria and the new wave-influenced vocals of Jonathan Davis made for a unique sound. "We started mixing all these influences to find our new sound," Head recalls. "We listened to everyone from Vai to Helmet, Nine Inch Nails, Pantera, Metal-

"There were moments where we felt the cheaper guitar sounded better!"

HEAD

lica and Faith No More, plus all this hip-hop music. Jonathan loved Duran Duran, Depeche Mode and The Cure, so it really was an interesting blend, with us embracing that low B-string on guitar. That's what was cool about nu-metal and the movement we started. We put all these genres together because we were fans and tried to make it our own, which I think we did."

Requiem sees the band expanding on the melodic structures within that heavy sound. The album's nine tracks – totalling just over half an hour – feel remarkably tight and focused, with no shortage of powerful themes and anthemic hooks. One of the standout tracks, *Let The Dark Do The Rest*, has the band revisiting the tones of their 1998 album - and commercial breakthrough - *Follow The Leader*.

Head explains: "*Let The Dark Do The Rest* was a homage back to 1998 and the track *B.B.K.* – which had a lot of those screechy sounds. We love making weird noises with our guitars. When you kick in that Whammy pedal and push all the way down it kinda sounds like a catfight! Filling that synthy or keyboardy space using our guitars is something we love doing. Our old producer, Ross Robinson, taught us that on the first two Korn records and we stuck with it. However, at the beginning of *Let The Dark Do The Rest*, you can hear these weird piano notes... that's actually Munky playing a keyboard on his iPhone with a mic on the speaker. It just sounded so cool, he was talking about recording it on a proper piano but we all said it sounded perfect as it was because of that super lo-fi vibe."

As per classic Korn albums of the past, the new tracks showcase how the two guitarists often cover different ends of the instrument at the same time – maximising the depth of the group's collective sonic profile. There are moments on tracks such as *Lost In The Grandeur* where they're not even playing notes in the conventional sense, instead looking at their instruments purely on a noise-making level like Tom Morello of Rage Against The Machine, who started making waves in the same Californian clubs a few years before them...

"Exploring the whole fretboard to divide and conquer is extremely important," explains Munky. "When I grew up, I always felt like the higher strings and top of the neck was just for soloing. But then I started finding these staccato, dissonant sounds that were really useful. Whether it was just a noise or sound effect or even a pick scrap across the higher strings, I started to think about how I could include those things into my riffs. It filled out the spectrum, because I was using the higher and lower end of the guitar's range within the same riff...

"That's one thing I always tell new players: don't be afraid to use the higher strings or go up the neck. And it doesn't always have to be the 'traditional' way of playing guitar. Come at it more like a sound designer trying to find the right noises, in combination with the low rhythmic thing on the heavy strings. It's fun for people listening through headphones. We want to put some noise candy in there for people to go,

"I was using the higher and lower end of the guitar's range within the same riff"

MUNKY

'Woah, did you just hear that?!' Tom Morello was great at all that stuff – using the whole guitar, from the body to the hardware, as his instrument. He'd even use the strings above the nut to get these unorthodox noises, and we started doing that too, just to create more atmosphere."

Tracking the guitars for *Requiem* was very much business as usual for Munky and Head – the former sticking with his Ibanez Apex signature series, which were originally launched in 2007, and the latter handling his own custom models through ESP and LTD, having switched over from Ibanez in 2017. That said, the two guitarists also understand when situations call for something different, turning to other brands and instruments where necessary...

"We usually go through five to seven guitars each and figure out which sound best," says Head. "Every record is different because we get new guitars and the tones change depending on what the tracks needs. On this record, I used one of my ESPs and one of my signature LTDs, which was funny, because the more expensive ESP model didn't always sound the best. There were moments where we felt the cheaper guitar sounded better! I can't explain why. We'd also grab old Telecasters, Strats and Les Pauls for little bits here and there. Jonathan has all this freakin' weird old guitars, which we'd use for verse overdubs and things like that."

"We'd bring out Fenders, Gibsons and 12-strings, even this seven-string acoustic that I have," adds Munky. "I also love the Fender Bass VI. I have one that was built in Mexico but it works great, I love how growly it sounds. There was also a Starcaster in there somewhere – we'll use random guitars to add extra textures and depth to certain parts, depending on what we're trying to accomplish. If it's a nice clean melody, for example, then we'll pick up a Telecaster."

Similarly, it was a mixed bag for amplification – the Korn pair using a combination of different heads and cabs to dial in that perfect punch, favouring an old-school analogue approach to their signal path as they typically have done in the past. Though very occasionally they might have used something like an Axe-FX or Kemper for "crazy atmospheric sounds", to their ears nothing sounds better than real valves being driven through loud speakers. You simply can't beat that sensation of air being moved, insist the Korn guitar duo, and we'd be inclined to agree.

"My setup is a 150-Watt Mesa/Boogie Triple Rectifier with a Diezel and an old modded Marshall, all get blended together," continues Munky. "The Marshall goes into a Marshall cab, the others into a Mesa cab, which are mic'd using various SM57 and Royer microphones. So there are quite a few faders mixing all these tones to make one sound! Head's side has a Triple Rec, a Bogner Uberschall and an Orange. When we're both playing, you're hearing six amplifiers! We also use these really expensive room mics to get more ambient sounds. It really helps because you feel like you're in the room with the cabinet, but from a back corner. You can feel the air being moved. Even if we only use a little bit of that, it sounds cool and brings a more distant sound that the up-close ribbon mics don't catch, with its own natural reverb."

In between the guitars and amps were a host of pedals, including many enduring staples of the Korn arsenal, including that "catfight" DigiTech Whammy pitch-shifter. The pair also engaged its lower octave harmony function to create what they refer to as "tractor" sounds, in order to thicken the main riffs with a distorted sub frequency. It's an old trick that, for them, will simply never go out of fashion.

"I also had my Boss Chorus Ensemble, which I've always used for melodies," recalls Head, citing it as his go-to. "You can hear it on *Let The Dark Do The Rest* and the chorus of *Start The Healing*, just to add some colour to the melody. I'd actually say seven or eight of the nine songs had that Boss in there somewhere, even if just a little bit to add a wet kind of feel. Sometimes I might even turn every knob so it's on full blast and warbles like it's underwater. I love that sound! Munky uses a different one, the pink Ibanez BC-9, which blends really well with mine. I had my old Uni-Vibe pedal with me. Munky used an Electro Harmonix Small Stone on *Worst Is On Its Way*."

"I also had a Strymon Timeline for repeats and the BigSky for those big open wet sounds," adds Munky. "I have some boutique pedals to get some crazy modulation – one of them is the Black-

"WE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT THEM!"

Thanks to EverTune bridges, life is peachy for Korn's guitarists

Launched roughly a decade ago, designed by engineers Cosmos Lyles and Paul Dowd, the EverTune bridge is a device that uses a spring and lever system to maintain string tension – offering a whole new level of tuning stability for guitar players. The aftermarket upgrade has proven to be particularly popular with metal guitarists who tune down, with the likes Devin Townsend and Trivium's Matt Heafy singing its praises for almost singlehandedly fixing all their tuning issues. Models for T-style and G-style six-stings to ones for seven and eight-strings range from $295 to $395 (US prices) in price and sold direct through the company's website.

"All our guitars are now fitted with EverTune bridges, which has saved us a lot of time," notes Munky. "It was an invention long overdue for guitar. Floyd Roses are great because they bring this extra level of expression but tuning has been an issue for me and Head for a long time. Not only in the studio, but also on stage. It would take hours to get our guitars in tune with the intonation correct, so the EverTune bridges have worked out really great. I don't think we could live without them!"

> "When you kick in that Whammy pedal and push all the way down it sounds like a cat-fight!"
> HEAD

"Tom Morello was great at using the whole guitar as his instrument"

MUNKY

box Quicksilver, which is similar to a Small Stone but it's a warbly delay. I also have this WMD Geiger Counter fuzz pedal which is really over the top and distorted… it's really dope."

There is a lot more to Korn than just seven-strings through high gain amps. "Uniqueness has always been very important to us," says Head, explaining how there's a sea of new bands and artists constantly coming out, arguably now more than ever. Those lacking a sense of strong musical identity often get pooled with the rest and disappear amongst the noise. Embrace your idiosyncrasies, he says, and celebrate whatever it is that makes you weird. After all, that's what worked for Korn.

"At the end of the day," Head says, "the best song wins, so my best advice is write, write and write. That's how to craft your skill and develop your gifts. It might take hundreds or thousands of songs until you find the one that shows you the way. I learned all my pentatonic and blues scales back in the day, they were pretty helpful. Then I moved onto major scales, running through them while watching TV, constantly practising to get the movement and finger strength. I got into Yngwie Malmsteen, George Lynch and Eddie Van Halen, but I couldn't develop a lead style that was as good. I could fake it, but those guys are on another level. It wasn't my calling to be a shredder."

He pauses for a second and points out how embracing his own limitations and oddities is precisely what got him to where he is today.

"Instead I found my own style through a band, rather than just my own solos," he says. "So we focused more on the riffs. When we wrote *Blind*, for example, we were listening to a lot of Mr. Bungle. They were so weird, with all those dissonant chords which we loved. Jonathan brought that song from his old band Sexart. We rewrote the chorus and made it really bouncy and heavy, taking it down really low. We came up with the intro because we all loved Jonathan's 'Are You Ready?!' and it needed an amazing build to get there. I look back now and think, 'What a cool, leftfield intro!' And that became our thing. When we started this band, we wanted to be weird because we love the weird…"

FENDER VS SQUIER

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

We explore the history, spec and tone differences between Fender and its sub-brand Squier, two of the biggest names in guitar. By Richard Blenkinsop

Fender and its sub-brand Squier are two of the biggest names in the world of guitar and bass. But what are the differences between the two? And which one is right for your setup and budget? Many of the guitars and basses produced by these two industry titans look the same, and in some cases actually sound very similar too. In this article we'll explain the differences between Squier and Fender, and how that can help you make a decision when buying a new instrument.

From Strats and Teles, to Precision basses, Jazzmasters and beyond, we'll explore the differences in sound between Squier and Fender, the build quality and feel you get for your money, as well as the history of the two brands. Let's dive straight in with some history.

The history

Fender has been a company for some time, but things really took off when Leo Fender invented the Telecaster (then called the Broadcaster, along with its earlier single-pickup incarnation, the Esquire) in 1950. Since then, they've gone on to pioneer numerous different guitar, amp and pedal designs, most of which have gone on to inspire millions and grace the biggest stages in the world.

Squier has been around since the late 19th century, though at first they were making violins and strings. They were acquired by Fender in the mid-60s and for a while they didn't do much. In the late '70s and early '80s, Japanese companies started to make copies of Fender's biggest-selling models. Japanese labor costs were cheaper than they were in the US, so they could make them to a good standard, for less money.

Fender, acknowledging the quality of these copies, licensed Squier to make budget versions of their most popular models to help get the guitars into the hands of more people. Since then, production of Squier has moved from Japan to China and Indonesia, in their own dedicated factories with a specially trained workforce that really know how to put a guitar together.

The players

When it comes to who uses Fender and Squier guitars and basses, most professionals tend to choose the former. With a more generous allowance for gear, players who perform on stages around the world go for Fender for their more refined sound, improved reliability and build quality, and because of the heritage of the brand too.

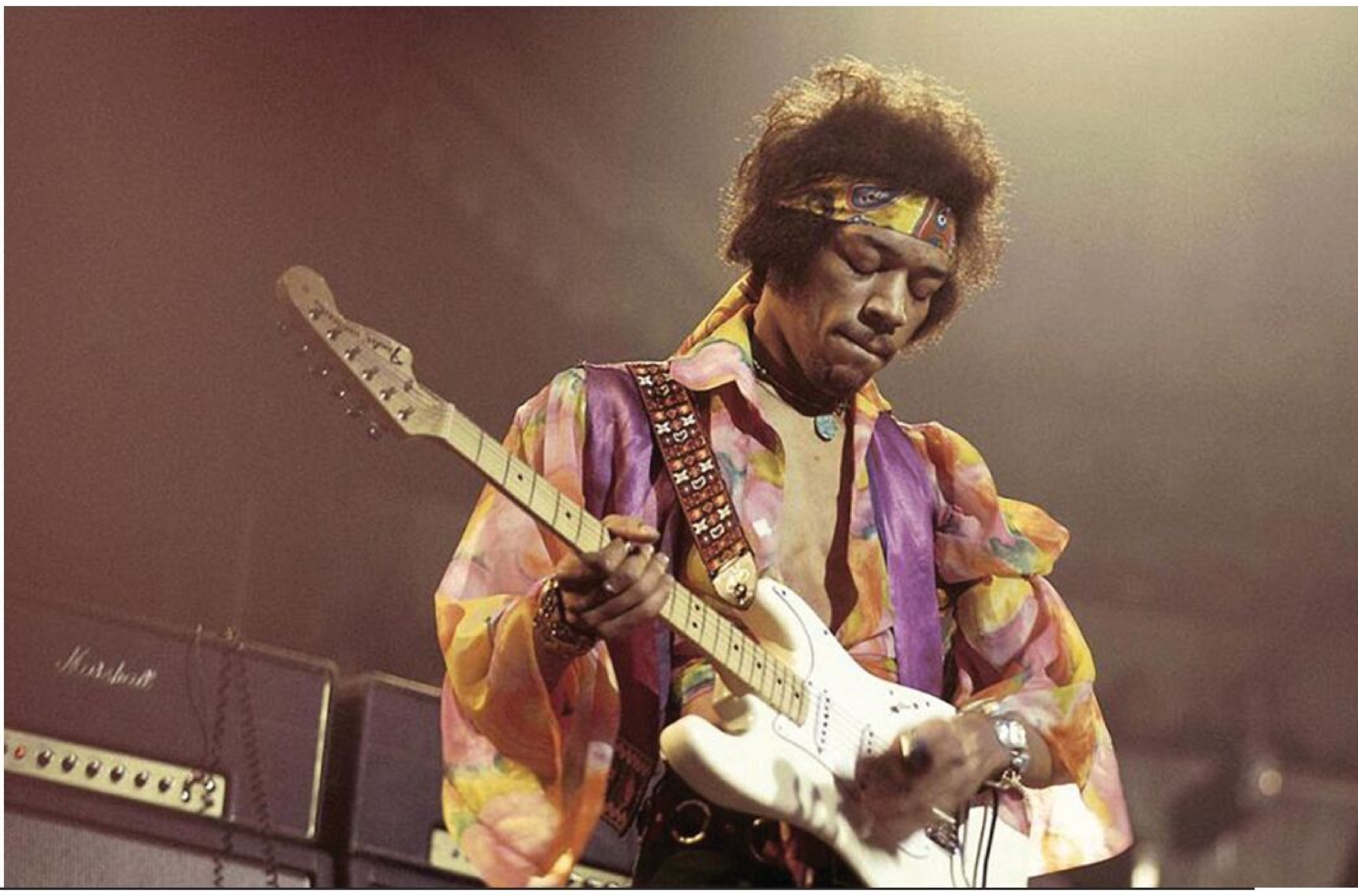
Just a few of the many names that have used Fender gear include Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan, John Mayer, Bruce Springsteen, Johnny Marr, Prince, Eric Clapton, Jim Root and absolutely loads more.

That said, there are pros out there that can be seen sporting Squier guitars. Pete Wentz of Fall Out Boy used his own signature Squier P-Bass in stadiums around the world; Jeff Healey used to use a really cool Squier Strat – Liam Gallagher's guitarist often uses a Squier Baritone Jazzmaster too for when they need some lower end beef.

Sounds & Tones

In a nutshell, Squier makes more affordable versions of Fender's biggest-selling models, though they do also have their own lines and models. They're made in the Far East and most of them are made using cheaper components. The pickups and hardware aren't quite up to the same quality, which in turn affects how the instruments sound and feel.

While all Squiers are made in the Far East, Fenders are made in Mexico, Japan and the USA,



with the price points generally going up in that order too. This can make comparing Squier and Fender difficult – if you're looking at a decent Squier and a lower-end Fender, you might not notice much difference. There tends to be a bit more consistency with the Fender stuff, but both are great options at an affordable price point. Compare a Squier to a top of the range US Fender, and there will be massive differences.

In terms of sound, Fenders usually have more of a dynamic range – that is they'll respond better to you using a really light touch, and a really heavy one. High quality pickups really help give out exactly what you put in, enabling you to play with more expression and more emotion. The better pickups in most of the Fenders also tend to have a wider frequency range, so you'll get a stronger and richer bass response from your lower strings, and a clearer and more detailed sound from your higher notes.

> If a Squier does the job, and it plays well, then you can perform without worrying about an expensive Fender getting damanged or stolen

For players just starting out, they might not notice too much difference in the sound, which is why many go for a Squier, and then move onto a Fender once they're more used to it and their ears are better tuned into tone. It's also worth pointing out that a Squier Tele and Strat will still have most of the tonal characteristics you'd associate with the parent models from Fender – they'll just be a slightly less refined version of what you'd get with a Fender.

The feel of the instrument can also be a difference between Squier and Fender. The build quality from Squier is really good, especially considering the price, however, it does tend to be better from Fender. Now and again, you might get a Squier with slightly rough fret ends – nothing too bad, but your fretting hand might notice it.

How everything's put together can also affect how the guitar resonates – if the instruments are assembled with more attention to detail, then they're likely to produce a better tone. Better hardware used on Fenders also helps them stay, and play in tune more accurately.

Which to get?

When looking to buy a guitar from either of these brands, it's worth considering how the differences between Fender and Squier might affect your purchase. If you're fairly new to guitar or bass, then you might want to think about starting out with a Squier. You'll be able to spend less cash – leaving you more budget for a guitar amp, strings, case and anything else you might need – and most of the differences between Fender and Squier won't really have any impact on your progress.

If you're looking to upgrade your current guitar or bass, then a Fender might provide you with an improved sound, better playability and just a higher quality instrument in general.

You should also think about where you'll be playing the guitar most. Are you after a guitar or bass for playing small shows in pubs and bars? By all means, get yourself a Fender, but 99 per cent of the audience won't be able to tell the difference between that and its Squier counterpart. If a Squier does the job, and it plays well, then you can perform without worrying about an expensive Fender getting damaged or stolen.

If you're going to be taking your new guitar to the studio, then here's where you might benefit from those higher quality pickups that you'll get with a Fender. When recording, you're more likely to hear all the nuances that better quality components will offer – and so will the listener!

Of course, budget is probably going to play a major part in what you choose. If you've got a fair chunk of money and you're looking for a high quality guitar, then go down the Fender route. A Squier will set you back less cash, and, although you'll forgo a number of improvements and upgrades, you're still going to get a decent guitar or bass that delivers most of that classic Fender sound.

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THE 10 TYPES OF STRING BENDING

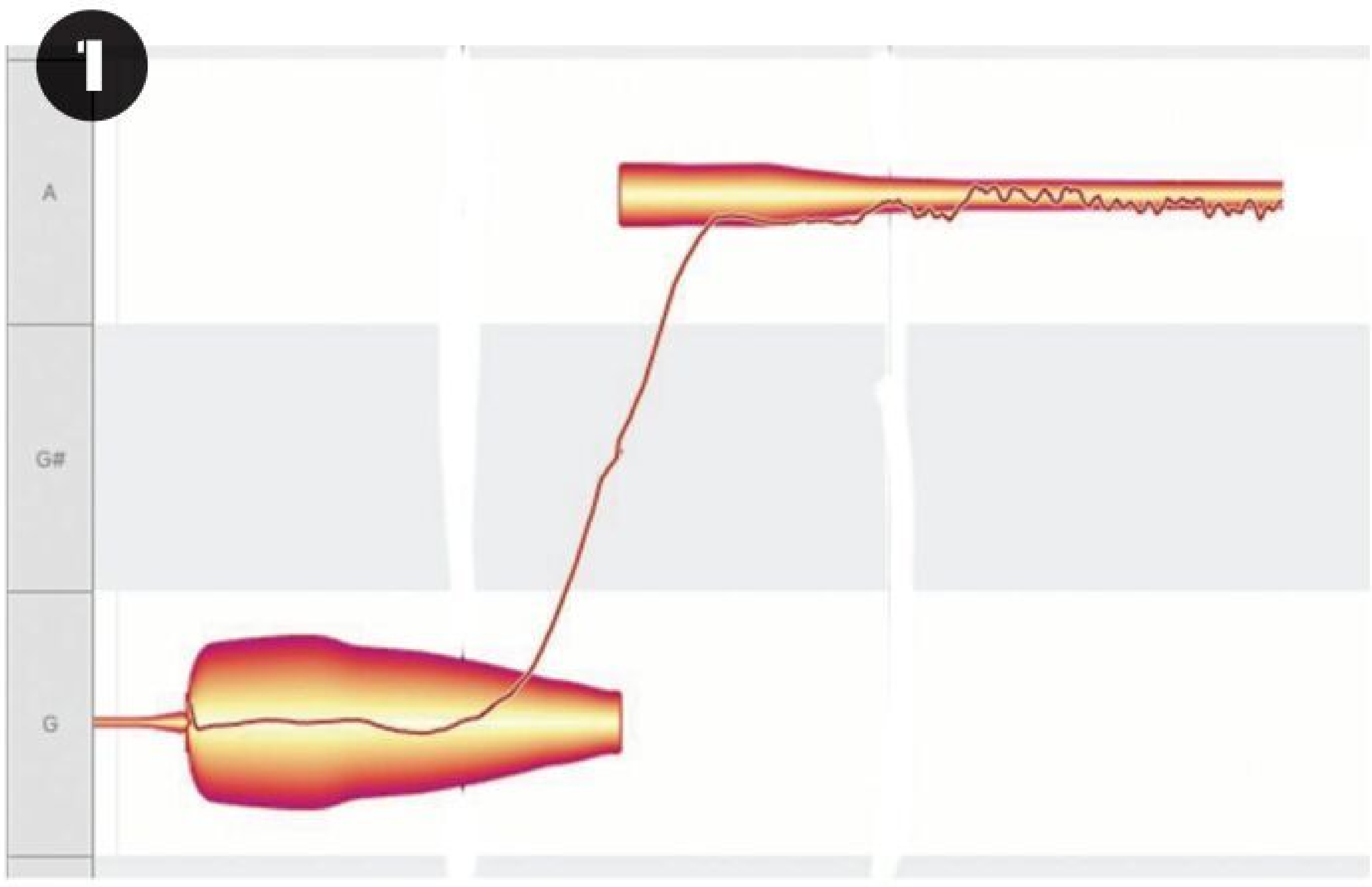
Who could have imagined an everyday act of guitar technique would become so controversial? We take a deep dive into bending and see how it's changed over the ages. By Milton Mermikides

Some aspects of electric guitar playing are so totally established as orthodoxy that they seem almost immune to change: standard tuning is a de facto, er, standard – open chords, powerchords and 'blues box' scale shapes, too. Like a goldfish and the water it lives in, we don't really question their existence.

So it came as a bit of a shock to some in August 2021 when Polyphia's Tim Henson innocently related to music YouTuber Rick Beato that he rejects conventional string bending techniques of the 'Boomer' generation "because it's gonna sound like that era".

Henson intended no disrespect (he actually paid homage to his heroes Jimi Hendrix and Black Sabbath) but in a conversation ostensibly about 'modern' guitar, Tim made it clear that he's most interested in new approaches and techniques.

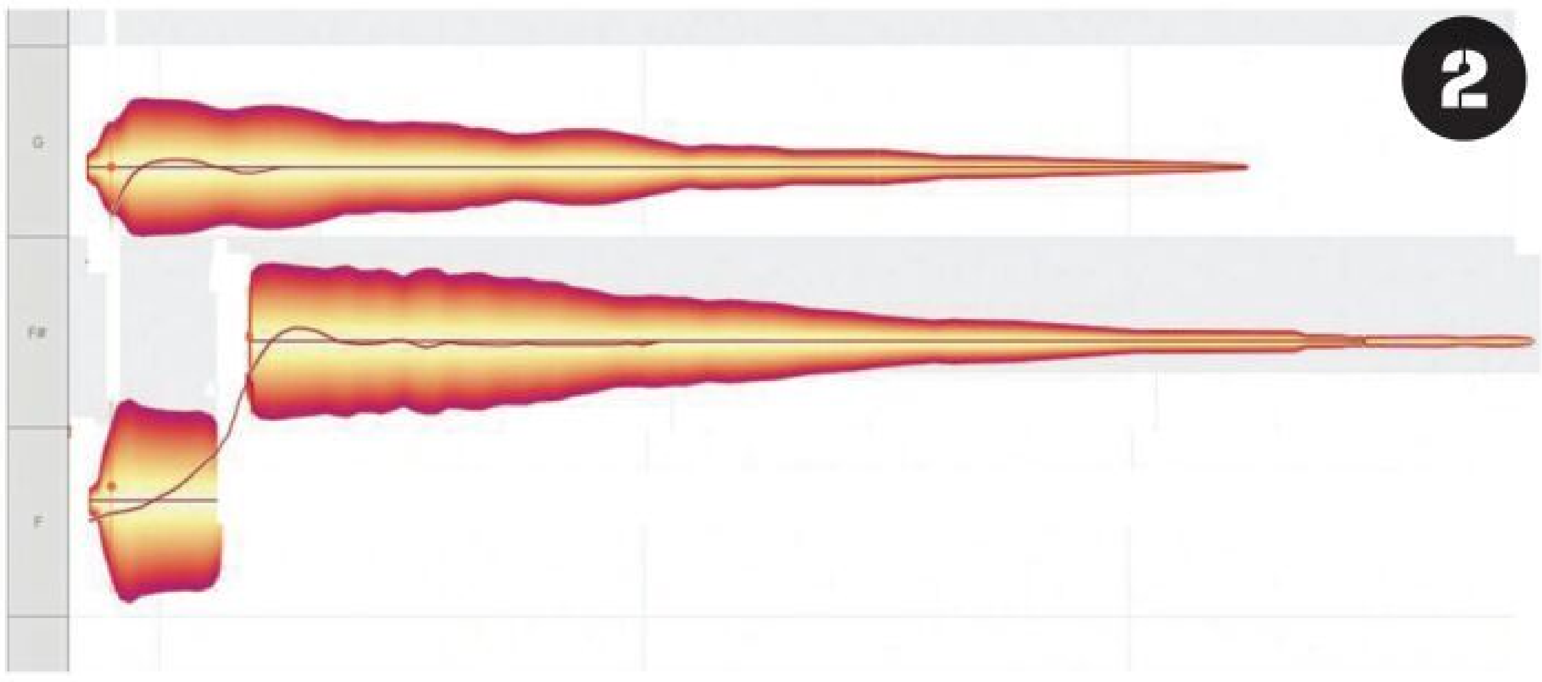
Here at Australian Guitar, we saw this as an opportunity to learn something new about guitar playing. So read on as we provide a taxonomy of key species of guitar bends from classic to contemporary. Learn them all, experiment with them in your own playing and you'll surely become a better guitarist whatever music you're into.



Classic bend #1: Blues bends

A huge core of electric guitar soloing is blues-based, and, though there are many blues bends, most connect adjacent notes in the minor pentatonic and blues scales. For example, in the A blues scale (A C D Eb E G) you'd typically bend from C to D, D to E, G to A, D to Eb or E, and occasionally the wider bends of A to C and E to G.

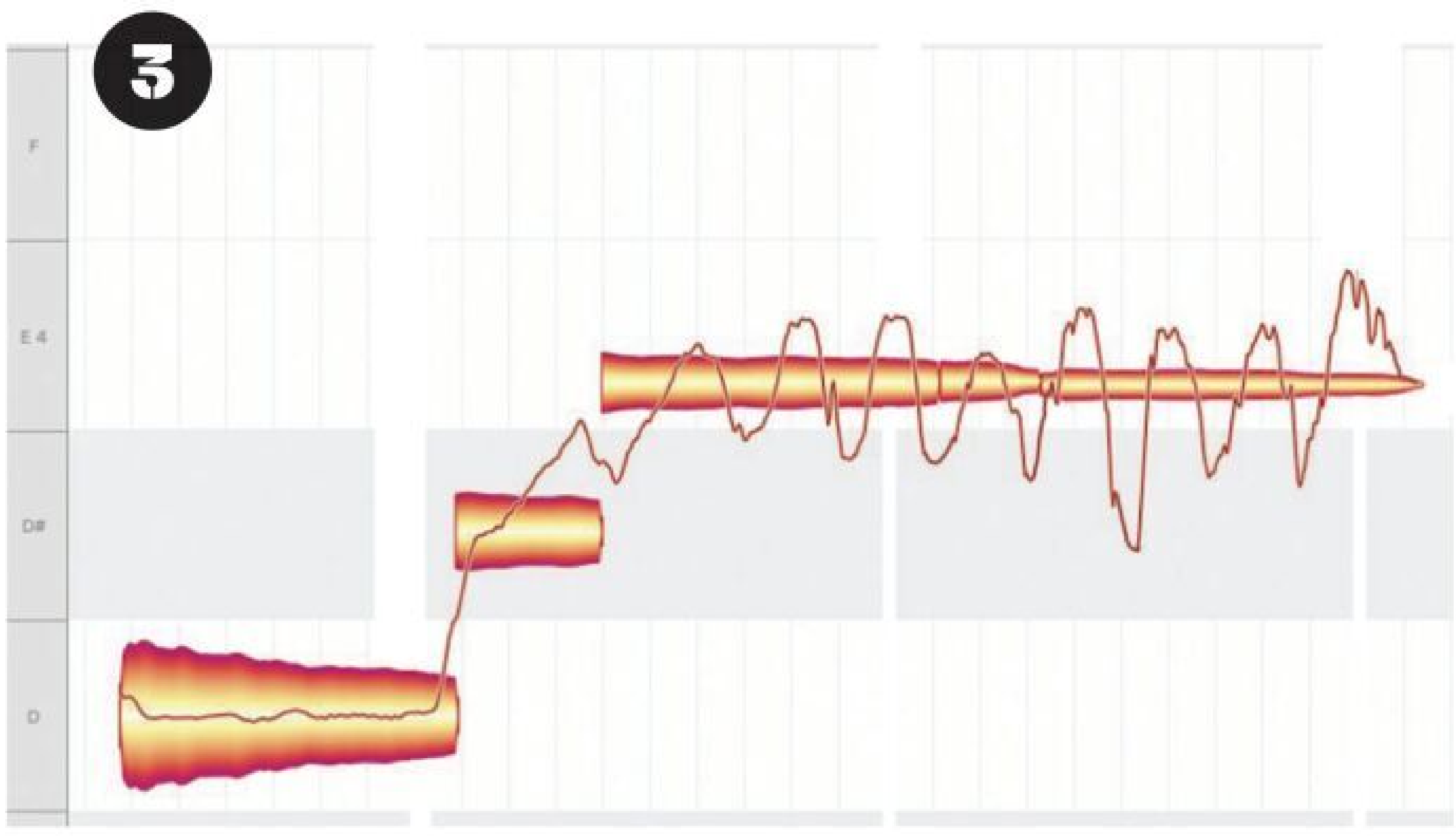
Equally important are the microtonal 'blues curls' that fall between the frets' tunings – most commonly the 'neutral 3rd' between C and C# in the key of A. These are all fundamental to 60s and 70s icons like Tony Iommi and Jimi Hendrix, and are still widely used by countless artists such as Mdou Moctar, Jake Kiszka, Joe Bonamassa and more.



Contemporary bend #1: The tweak bend

Tim Henson's own intro in Polyphia's G.O.A.T. features several of these. We're calling it a 'tweak bend' – it's a rapid up- or up down bend, usually played quickly and without vibrato between the semitones of a diatonic scale (e.g., F# and G in the key E minor).

There's none of the bluesy flavour associated with classic minor blues bends, just a restrained but committed attitude when you get it right. Play it with a light overdriven single coil tone for a Polyphia vibe.



Classic bend #2: Bend and shake

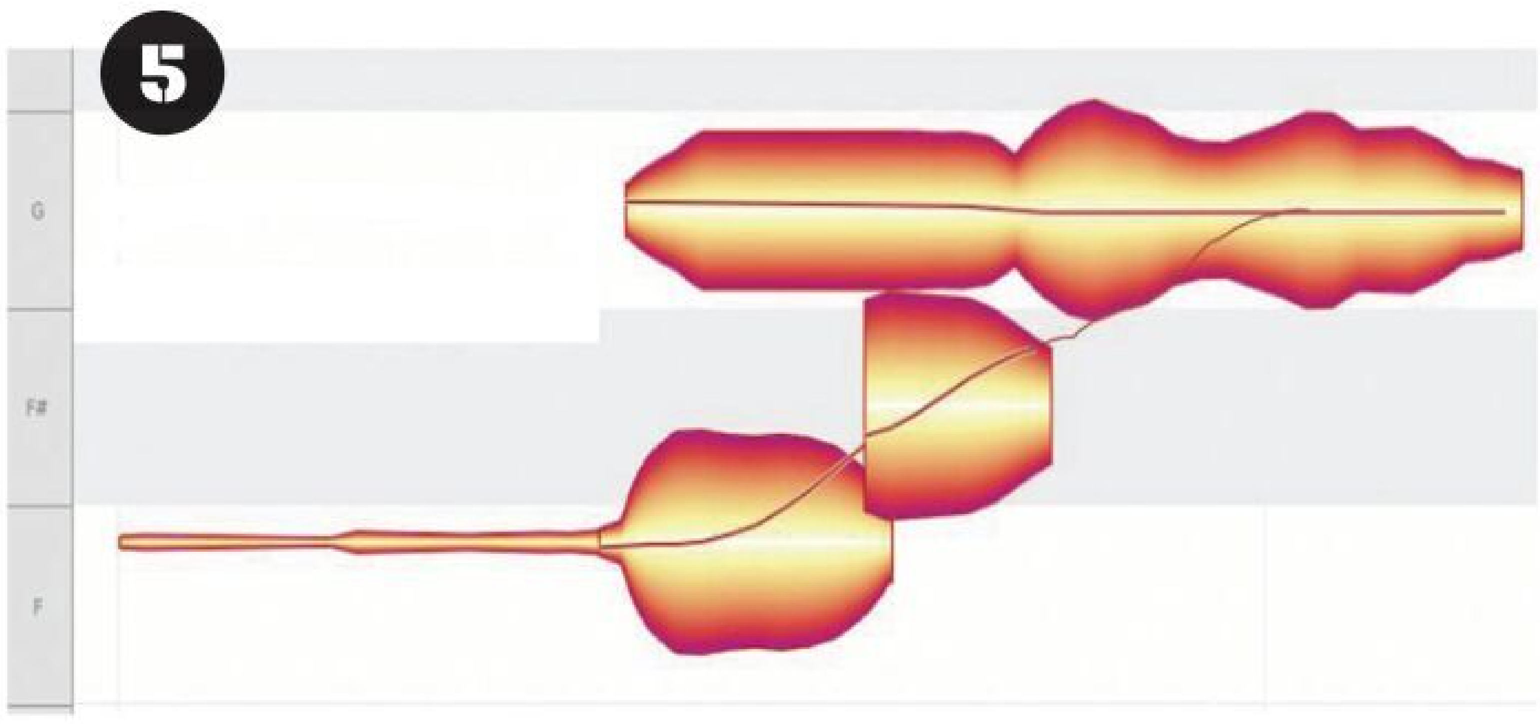
We're in Angus Young and Paul Kossoff-style blues-rock territory here. Both players turn the electric guitar into a highly emotive instrument, emulating the human voice with their expressive leads.

A common technique they both use in doing so is adding vibrato to string bends – reminiscent of a heartfelt blues/soul vocal 'cry' or 'wail'. Whole-tone bends (two semitones) rule the roost here.

Contemporary bend #2: The wobble bend

With a fragile, 'wobbly' quality reminiscent of whammy bar vibrato, this technique can be heard in the opening bars to Lost by Ichika Nito.

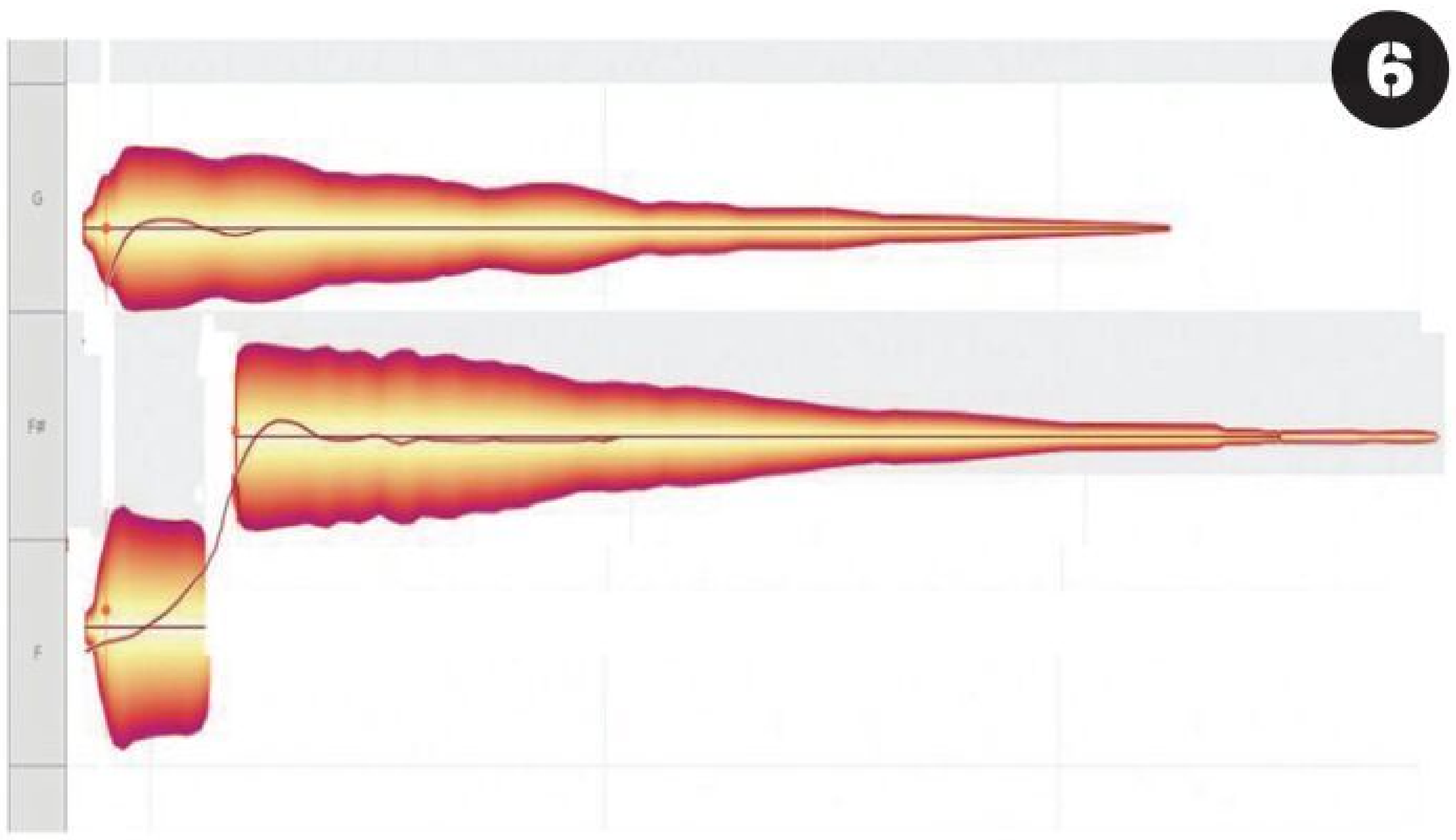
Its microtonal expressivity is reminiscent of the Japanese koto instrument, and, with typically less than a semitone of pitch variation, it exists on the boundary of vibrato and conventional guitar bend. The timing should be synced to the musical metre – almost like the pulsing effect of a chorus pedal.



Classic bend #3: The unison bend

Surely you know this one! The outro solo from Jimi Hendrix's All Along The Watchtower is a great reference for a technique which involves a string being bent up to a simultaneously held note of the same pitch.

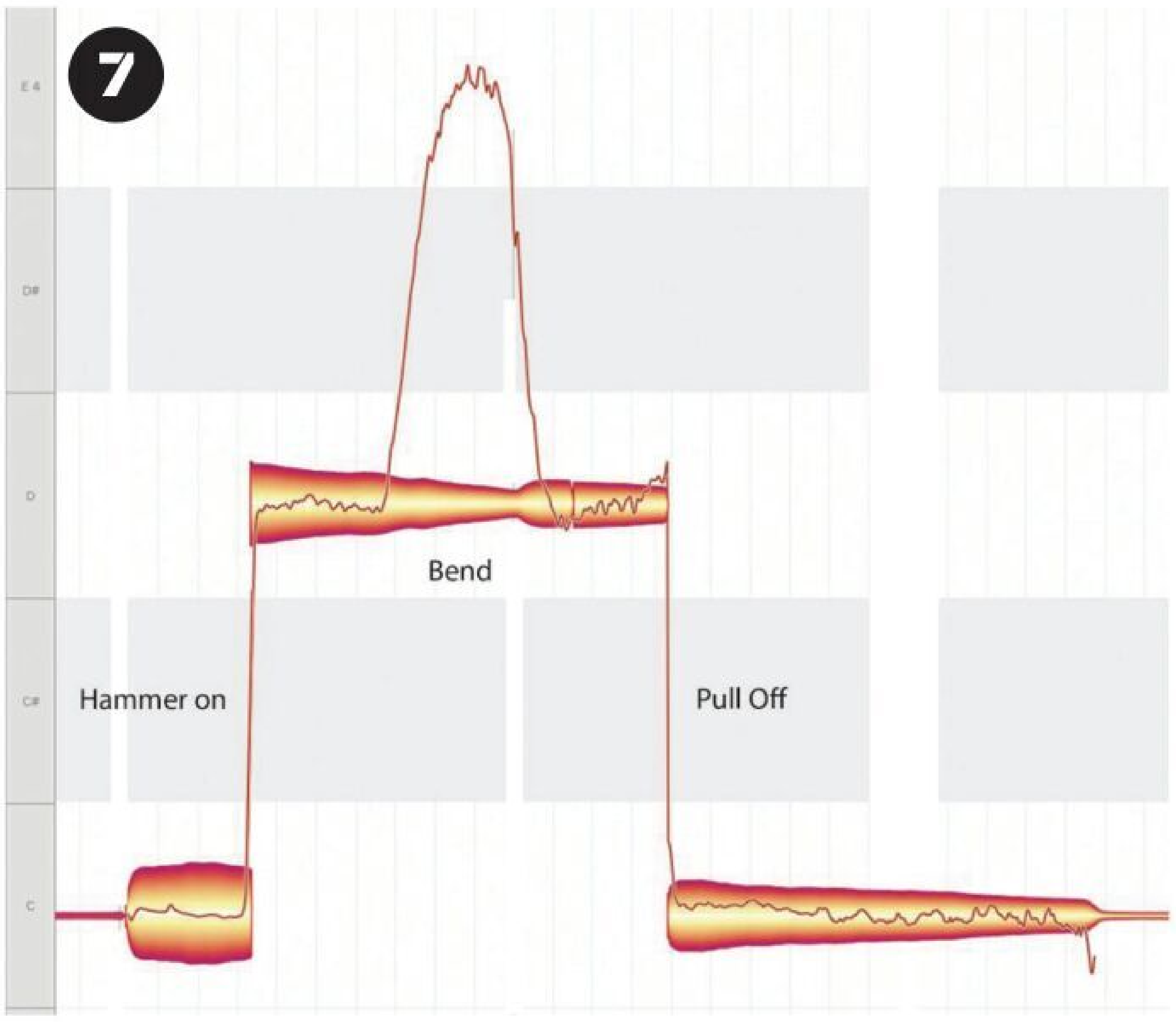
To do it, fret a G on the first string at the 15th fret and an F on the second string (18th fret). Pick the two strings together then bend the F to match the G. The resulting scream and dissonance between the two notes is heightened as you bend, then resolved when you hit the target.



Contemporary bend #3: The cluster bend

While the unison bend has survived numerous generations of guitar solos, it has also diversified. A notable contemporary example is the 'cluster bend', where the bent note – rather than reaching its unison target – stops a semitone short, goes a semitone above, or targets another deliciously dissonant interval. Listen to that bend, uh, cluster!

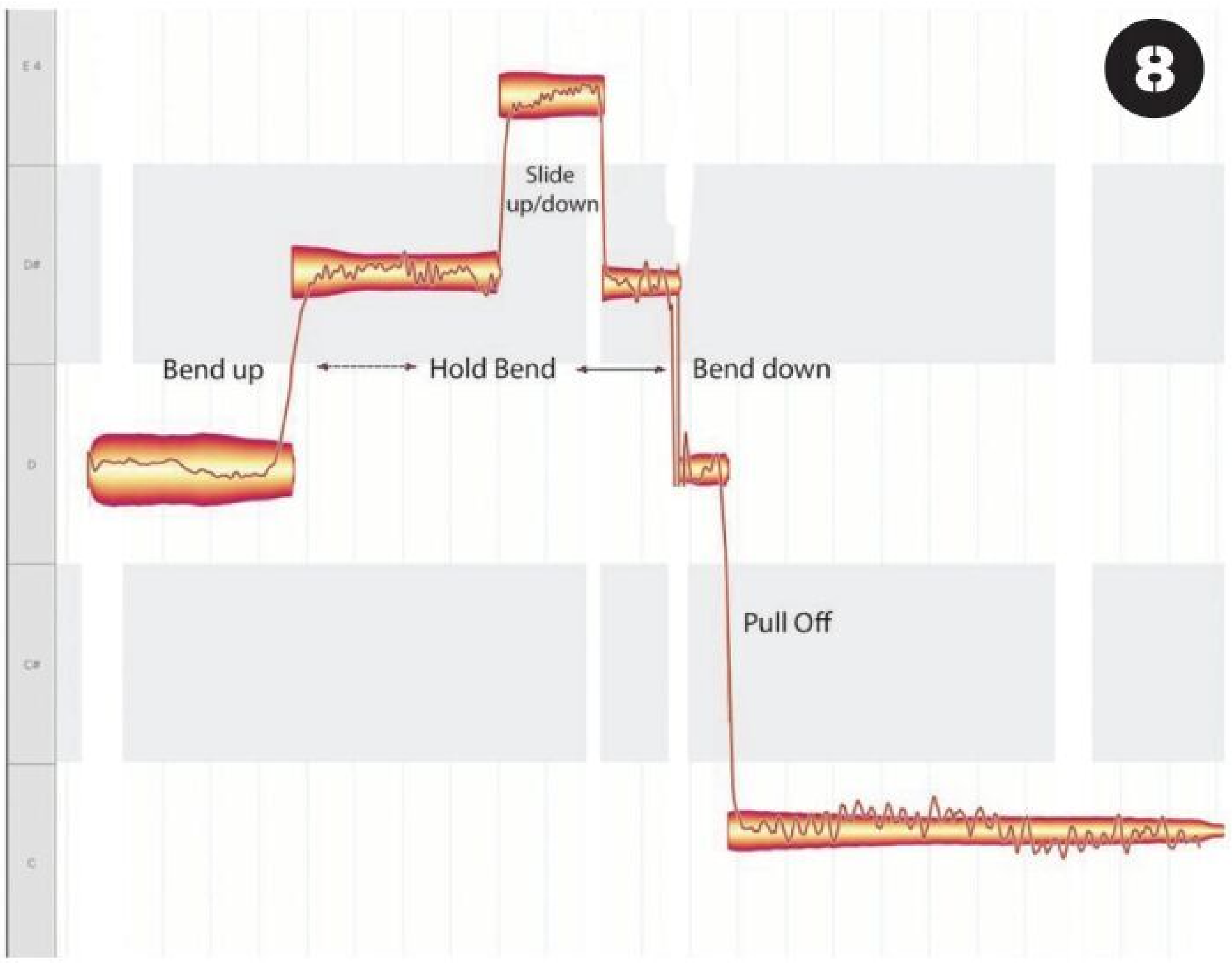
Hear it in action at 2:04 in Ulysses by Alluvial, where guitarist Wes Hauch plays a semitone bend into b5th and b2nd intervals.



Classic bend #4: The legato bend

String bends have long been played alongside other lead guitar articulations. One common approach is to use legato (slides, hammer-ons, pull-offs) on either side of the bend to create a collective phrase.

A great example comes between 5:53 and 5:58 during Allen Collins' solo in Lynyrd Skynyrd's Free Bird. This sort of slippery articulation is part of the established electric guitar vocabulary and there are countless variations on the theme.



Contemporary bend #4: The slidy bend

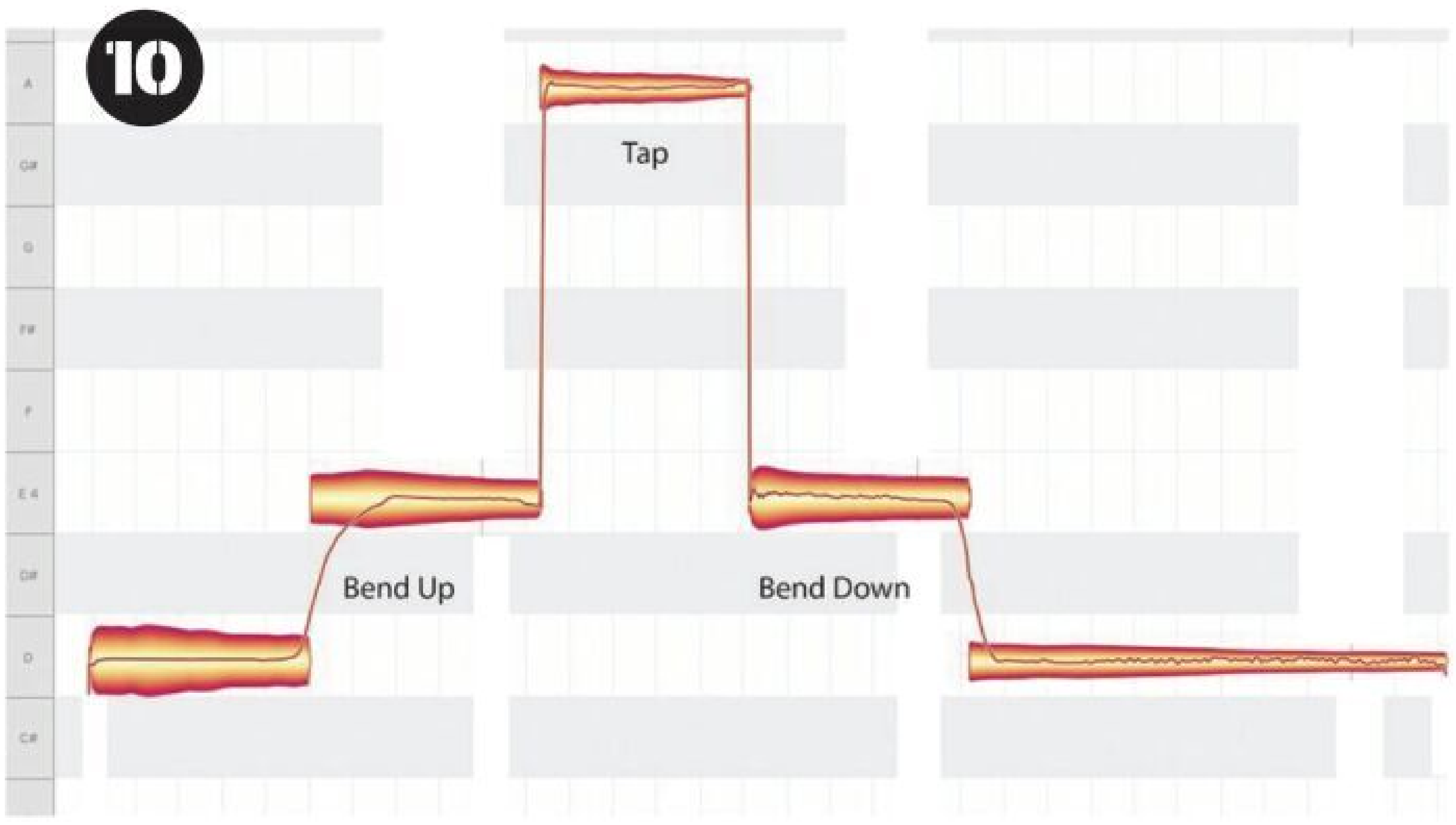
We're homing in on Mateus Asato's solo on Polyphia's Drown between 2:14 and 2:16 for this one. He's using a bend in a more complex way, adding intricate slurs and slides to proceedings.

It's basically: bend, hold bend, slide up a semitone, slide down again, then release the initial bend and finish with a pull-off. Sound easy? Think again. These are surprisingly challenging to execute in tune, and the virtuosity may well go unnoticed because they're often fleetingly brief.

9. Classic bend #5: The melody bend

Some solos use bends to create complete melodic phrases rather than just as momentary inflections. We're especially looking at you, David Gilmour – the outro solo in Pink Floyd's Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2 features a couple of good examples like this.

These potentially string-snapping licks are tricky to execute, and demonstrate that the 'classic' era of rock was in no short supply of sage string benders. If you want to save your strings, try downtuning by a semitone and playing one fret higher!



10. Contemporary bend #5: The tap bend

Fans of contemporary math-rock acts like Chon, Polyphia and Covet will be no strangers to tapping – the technique is at the heart of these acts' styles.

Tapping bent strings expands the available range for bends and allows phrases to continue almost indefinitely – the tap providing additional energy to the string. Though considered a 'modern' rock technique, it was already commonplace by the mid 80s thanks to the influence of players like Eddie Van Halen and Steve Vai.

11 The zero bend

So perhaps the final and most radical bend we should include is… one that doesn't exist: the 'Zero Bend'. A frivolous inclusion, you say? Well okay, guilty as charged! However, it's not without precedent in the math-rock genre. Yvette Young's work with Covet features barely a single string bend.

Who knows if future generations will one day look back at the quaint and dated bending techniques of Boomers and Zoomers alike as they explore AI, robotic and mind-controlled hyper-bends among, perhaps, a renaissance in CDs, denim and NFTs.

LINE 6
CATALYST
COMBO GUITAR AMPLIFIERS
CATALYST
LINE 6
ORIGINAL AMP DESIGNS
TRADITIONAL OPERATION
MODERN VERSATILITY
CATALYST
CATALYST
CATALYST
CATALYST 100
CATALYST 200
CATALYST 60
SCAN TO LEARN MORE

"You can't throw on every delay and reverb - it will be overwhelming..."

Words Jenna Scaramanga **Photos** Corrina Becker, Robin Laananen

In the dream-pop art-rock of Warpaint, Theresa Wayman is now experimenting with dry guitars amid the ambient tones

POP ART
"I love beautiful pop songs that have this perfect simplicity," Theresa says.

When Warpaint convened in 2019, there was a plan. As guitarist Theresa Wayman recalls: "We were all anxious to record an album the way we used to when we were starting, together in the rehearsal space just writing and jamming and playing things over and over, really honing songs."

At first, this plan went swimmingly. In the earliest stages, the band set to work at drummer Stella Mozgawa's home studio. "The best moment was when we got together in the first stages of writing," Theresa says. "We all came in with some tracks we had started. We put those on and started learning them, bringing them to life. It was an ecstatic moment."

From there, they moved to a pro studio, Rancho De La Luna, in Joshua Tree, that fabled outpost in the California desert, where they were joined by producer Sam Petts-Davies. There was one track, *Trouble*, that was recorded with the whole band playing live. "There's something magical about that," Theresa says. But, she adds with a sigh: "The logistics always seem to step in."

'Logistics' in this case came from singer/guitarist Emily Kokal's pregnancy. Warpaint raced to finish the basic sessions before Kokal's daughter arrived. "There was a lot of emphasis on getting the bass and the drums recorded," Theresa says. "The basic structures of the songs, and saving the top line guitar and vocal stuff for later." And then: "The day Emily gave birth was the day LA shut down for the pandemic."

Theresa is audibly frustrated that the process couldn't have been further from the planned jamming. "We were all separated and this album became a very piecemeal, separated project." She tracked some of her remaining guitars at home with an amp borrowed from her boyfriend. Writing without her bandmates had its own challenges. "Being really isolated, you start to go down certain roads on your own. You think you're getting somewhere, but sometimes they don't get it. That's a really hard bit of feedback. You've spent so much time and energy putting your heart into something and other people are like, 'I don't know…'"

With Stella returning to her native Australia and bassist Jenny Lee Lindberg going home to Utah, the band attempted to work across three time zones. "It was really hard to finish the album in such a disjointed way," Theresa says. "Especially the mixing. We tried doing [online] mix sessions. It's just so difficult with everyone at a different time of day through different speakers in a different mood. No aspect of it is a shared experience. It was really hard to come to consensus."

Despite the unusual circumstances, *Radiate Like This* is an outstanding Warpaint album. Despite the drawn out process, Mozgawa and Lindberg's live rhythm tracks from Rancho De La Luna give it an organic vibe. "We had a lot of heart and soul in there just from the recording sessions. Thank god we had that," agrees Theresa.

Having so long to finish the album had advantages too. "It was amazing in a lot of ways because I've never actually been able to sit with our songs for that long since the early days, to really figure out what I wanted to do with them. There's a lot more consideration to the songs because of that extra time."

Warpaint thankfully found a solution to their mix problem in Kokal's hometown. "Eventually we found somebody in Portland," Theresa explains. "Emily and I were able to go and do some real hands-on mixing the analogue, old-fashioned way. You make your decisions there and then, and that's it. That was an incredible experience, the antithesis of our modern processes."

Radiate Like This finds Warpaint at their most dreamlike and poppy. There is less of the rocking out or math rock time changes that distinguished their early efforts, but the reflective mood feels appropriate. For her part, Theresa found a new approach to writing guitar parts. "I was actually messing around a lot with as clean a tone as possible, just seeing what it was like to have a really naked sound. Is that a sign of maturity or something? More and more I just want songs and parts to stand on their own as they are, and inherently have strength in them. I'll add effects after as it suits, but not using that as the means of writing the parts.

> "I was just seeing what it was like to have a really naked sound"

"You have to be a lot more intentional with what you write if you're not being smudged out by a lot of reverb or delays. You need to make sure that you're listening to the other parts. It was really interesting to sit with the songs and meditate on what the other parts are, how to interweave in between those, rather than just smearing over the top of them."

Kokal and Wayman are masters of ambient guitar tones, and Theresa is very forthcoming about how to build those tones without descending into chaos. "You can't just throw every delay and reverb on or it will become really overwhelming. You get a slapback or an almost imperceptible short delay that just makes the tone sound wider. If you put reverb on that, it blends the delay even more so that you don't hear it as an actual repeat. You have to take your time and go more subtle than you think – well maybe not with everything, but if you're tuned in, small moves are actually more impactful."

Having written the parts for *Radiate Like This* with dry tones, Theresa found herself stripping back effects for recording as well. "There's oftentimes a lot of effects on the other aspects and the other layers within our songs, so I was drawn to stripping away any effects and just letting things be clear. I tried all kinds of things. I started to use a phaser and a wah. I was trying to introduce some other sounds and none of them were really sticking because it felt like these songs called for cleaner tones."

As always, Theresa's '64 Fender Mustang was her main guitar, recently joined by its twin sibling: "I have a new '64 – new to me – Mustang exactly like mine. It just has different pickups. A friend of mine who works at [music store] Future Music found it. I walked in one day and he was like, 'I just got off the phone with someone who has a red '64 Mustang. It was their dad's and they just want to get rid of it.' It was so serendipitous that I walked in at that moment. I decided to grab it because I thought maybe my son could use it, and it'd be nice to have a backup of the same guitar. It has a P90 in the neck. It has a really brilliant tone, rings out in a really different way. It feels really good so I was using that some. For the most part I've just been using my setup, which is an AC30 and my Mustang."

Don't get the wrong idea about dry tones, though. *Radiate Like This* is still full of glorious ambient sounds, and Theresa was happy to tell us (roughly!) how she got them. "I'm not the best person for remembering exactly what I did. I just feel my way through. I usually stack a couple delays and reverbs on my Mustang just to make try to give more depth and sustain. I have a Boss DD-6 and an Earthquaker Devices Dispatch Master. The Catalinbread Adineko has some really wicked delays on it and get can get really bizarre too, warbly and interesting. I usually put that into a phaser because it creates a chorus effect. I'll do multiples, like a short one and then a longer delay, and then the Dispatch Master will get it really dreamy and washy if I want it to be. A chorus and a shorter delay always good to mix in there, just to create the illusion of a wider sound on the on the initial hit, and then I have an actual delay."

The core guitars sound clean and full-bodied, and Theresa explains that an overdrive is essential to achieve this with the Mustang. "I usually like to gain it up just a little bit as well even if it's not super obvious. I like it to feel really hot. If I'm picking softly, the more I gain it up for that richer tone. It fills out the sound, and I need as much of that as possible with the Mustang. If it's not overdriven it will just sound thin and harsh." For this album, gain came from the JHS Sweet Tea overdrive.

With the album complete, Theresa is already thinking about what to create next. "This is exactly what we were trying to achieve. I love beautiful pop songs that have this perfect simplicity. It can be a complex thing to achieve. I'm really itching to get back into live and experimental things.

"*Radiate Like This* is a lot more poppy in a Warpaint way. I love that about it. There's this other aspect to us that is the antithesis of that, that has some weirdness and dissonance and isn't always palatable. I want to explore those aspects of ourselves again."

For Theresa, playing live is where she finds joy. "We played a show last weekend. We got back together after two years and started playing together. That's when I had that feeling it was just amazing to play again. It felt like playing all our old songs for the first time."

The MOD SQUAD

ROCK 'N' ROLLERS

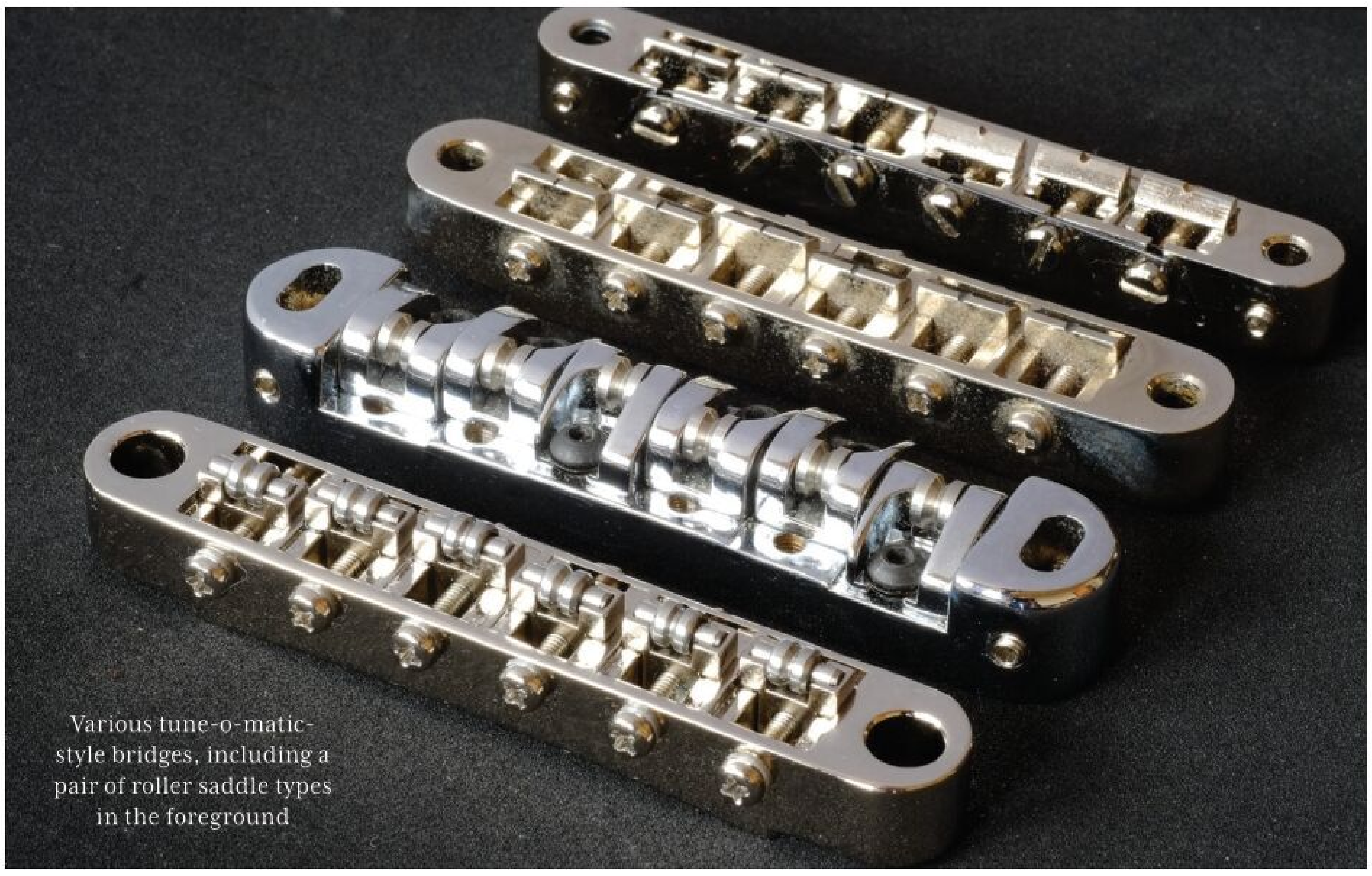
What is it with vintage-style vibratos? Can't get enough or can't get in tune? You can't rock without the roll(ers), suggests Dave Burrluck

Some years ago I was asked why I played a PRS guitar. "Because it plays and stays in tune," was my reply. Over three decades later, while many makers have been influenced and inspired by PRS, not all have paid attention. There are a colossal number of guitars that leave factories all over the world that don't play – let alone stay – in tune. Most, but certainly not all, have vibratos often based on designs that date back to the 50s.

Two of my favourites, Fender's offset Jazzmaster/Jaguar type and the good ol' Bigsby, might appear very different, and while in design they are, in function they're very similar. Both are two-piece designs in that, unlike the futuristic Stratocaster vibrato, they have a separate bridge in front of the vibrato mechanism. It means that the Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, in its various styles, can crop up in lots of different settings, from a slab solid-body to a full-size jazz archtop. The Fender offset vibrato requires routing a sizable hole under the vibrato assembly, which means it shows up on solid or semi-solid designs. I can't ever remember seeing one on an archtop… although I'm sure some mad modder has had a go.

> "The main things that affect your vibrato function are friction and geometry"

And yet both styles have another commonality: tuning stability issues. For the at-home player, or even home recordist, some basic TLC will usually cure those. But for the regularly gigging musician, well, there's absolutely no place for failure. My experience writing about Gretsch's Streamliner G2622T-P90 is a case in point. I thought I'd got everything stable, tuning-wise, until I turned up for a hectic band rehearsal where we had to run through a lot of songs in a short time after a long lockdown lay-off. While the Gretsch impressed my bandmates with its style and sound, after going a bit Neil Young in one solo I was so out of tune we had to stop. Not ideal. And I really thought I'd sorted the problem.



Various tune-o-matic-style bridges, including a pair of roller saddle types in the foreground

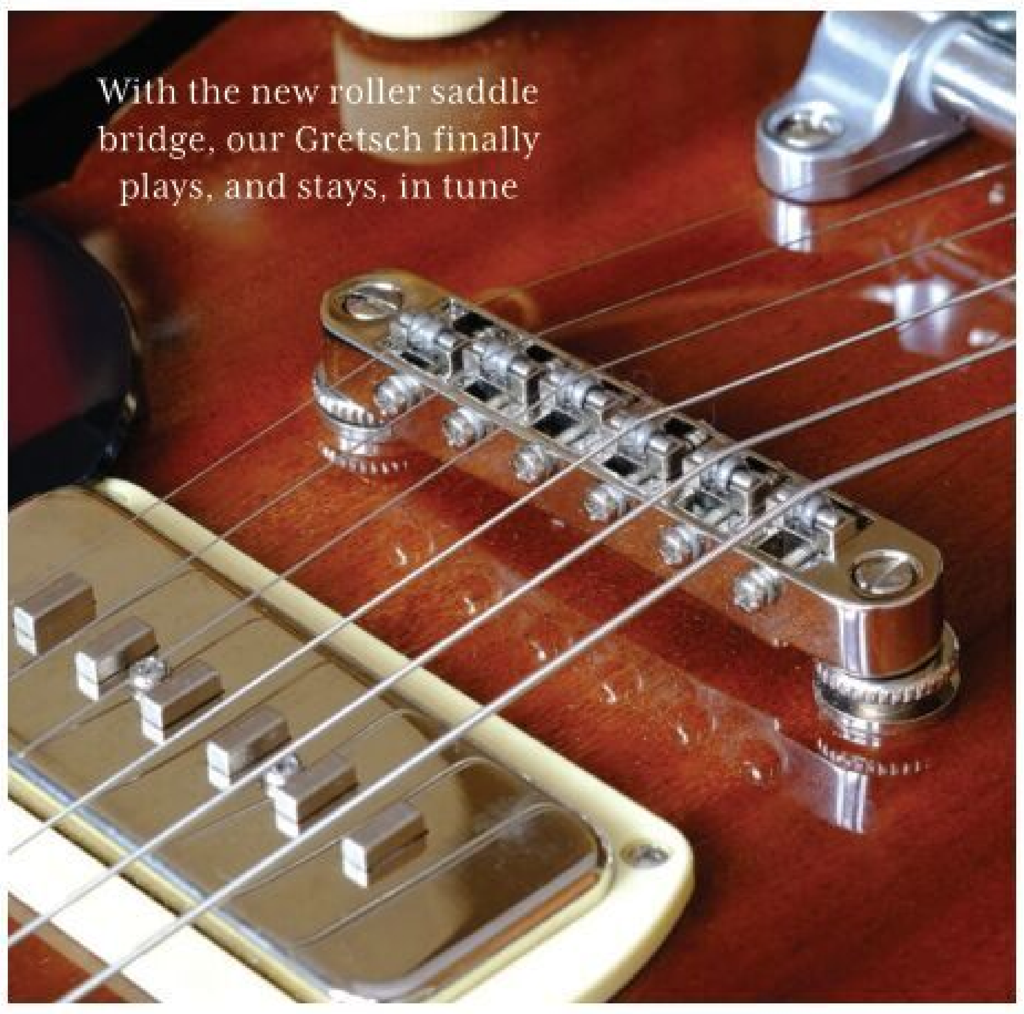
Investigation

The main things that affect how well your vibrato will function are friction and geometry. As to the former, you're looking for smooth, friction-free nut and saddle grooves, just as you would with any non-vibrato guitar. Of course, attaching the strings correctly is a must, although with a Bigsby – or indeed an offset vibrato – the amount the string actually moves at the nut is really small. Locking tuners can help when you're restringing but really aren't necessary: keep wraps around the post to a minimum and it makes sense to lock the string around the post. Obviously, strings need to be stretched properly, too.

If all of that is ship-shape, then the main culprit is invariably the bridge itself, and this is reflected by the different styles that'll accompany your Bigsby. The most common is simply a tune-o-matic style, as with our Gretsch, which slightly rocks forward and back as you depress the vibrato arm then let it go or pull it back. So long as there's no friction at the saddles you should be good to go, but, as I found, the tuning can still drift more than you'd like.

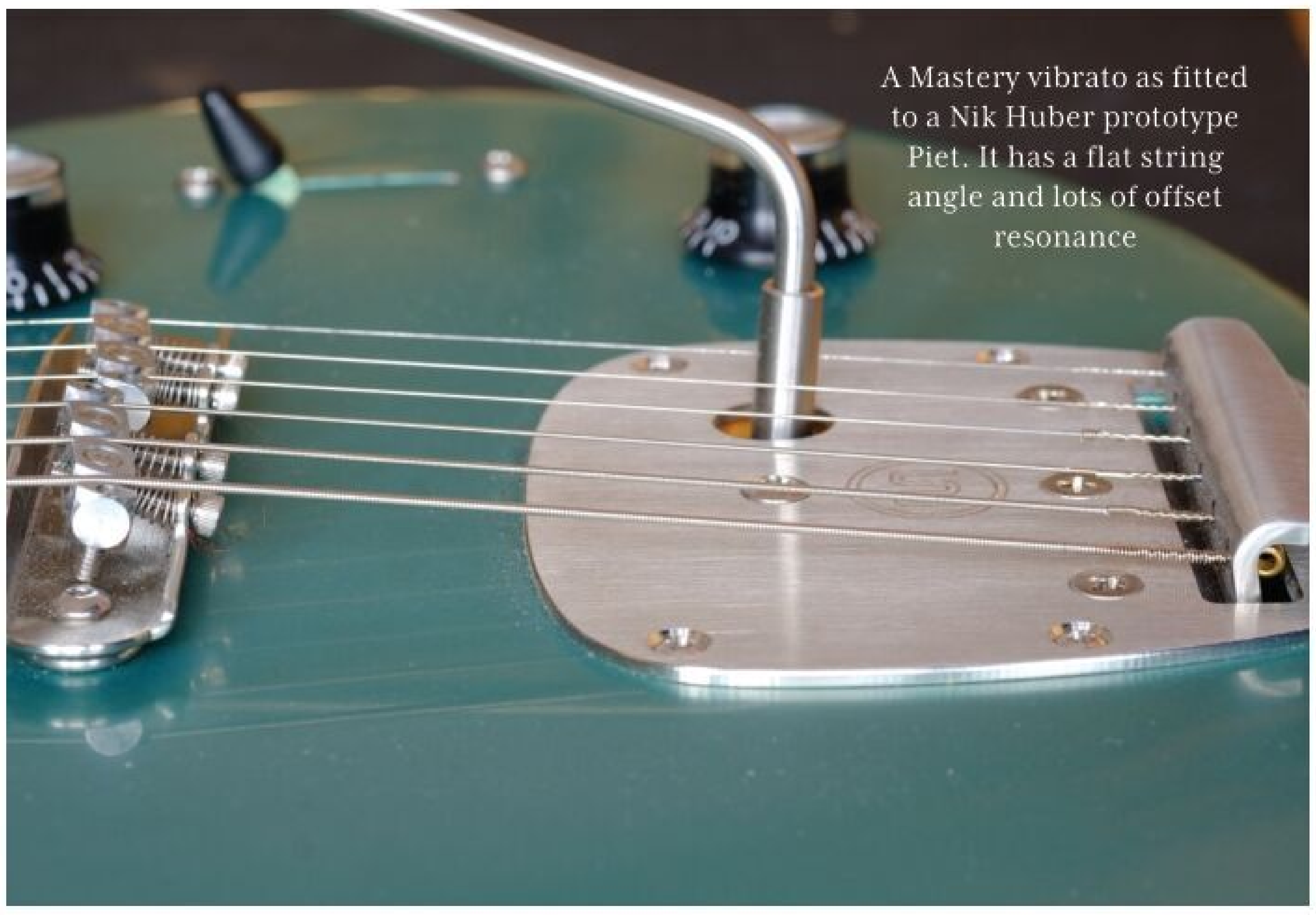
I suspected the problem was that – as well as the bridge rocking – the saddles themselves were moving very slightly when you depress the arm and not quite coming back in the same place when you let the arm go and full string tension is restored. Compare a basic bridge like this (simply stamped B-2) with something like a TonePros AVR-II and you'll see the difference: the saddles are held firmly in

We went with this type for our troublesome Gretsch model



With the new roller saddle bridge, our Gretsch finally plays, and stays, in tune

With the simple mods sorted, the Gretsch plays like a different guitar



A Mastery vibrato as fitted to a Nik Huber prototype Piet. It has a flat string angle and lots of offset resonance

Note the steeper back angle and firmer feel with this offset vibrato setup

place. It's the same with a Gotoh 'Nashville' style that I also had in the bitsbox – there's zero saddle movement. To test my theory, I simply slackened the strings and swapped to the Gotoh bridge, which obviously has the same large (6mm diameter) slot-head posts. Without doing any additional setup chores, the improvement in tuning stability was very noticeable.

Get Rolling

Another solution that doesn't mean I've got to renotch and smooth the saddles on the Gotoh bridge is to use a roller saddle tune-o-matic, which should, in theory, be friction-free. There's a very nice one from ABM, but it's far from a cheap fix (expect to pay around $300). As ever, StewMac has a good selection that includes the TonePros TP6R tune-o-matic, which is still costly (expect to pay around $150) but can, of course, be locked to its posts. Schaller's Roller Bridge is typically high quality and the rollers sit on threads so you can adjust the individual string spacing.

StewMac's own Golden Age-brand roller saddle tune-o-matic is used to great effect by Gordon Smith on its offset Gatsby, which played beautifully in tune and was very stable when I tested it recently. It's more affordable, too. Finally, StewMac also offers the chunky Locking Roller bridge, which is the same bridge that Taylor has long used on its T3/B. As the name implies, each saddle can be locked in place, it's quite modern in style, and the one I have is around 25 per cent heavier than a standard tune-o-matic.

"A roller saddle tune-o-matic type should, in theory, be friction-free"

Obviously, some of these bridges are available via other suppliers. You can try Amazon or eBay, too, if you like – that Locking Roller bridge seems to be available under various brand names at different price points and quite possibly different specifications. Choices!

I then remembered WD Music (who ship to Australia) has been a saviour to me countless times, not least with its quick service. The company has its own-brand roller saddle bridge (stamped BH-1993), which you'll also see under different brand names, but it's one I've used before and seems a more suitable candidate at around $60. I ordered one up, adding a couple of pots I needed, and soon enough I had the new bridge.

It's certainly a tidy part, the alloy rollers are free turning (although I did just add a little light oil) and the saddles themselves needed no shaping or smoothing. Again, I just slackened off the strings and loaded it on. At this stage I didn't fit new strings, I just doubled-checked the string height and set the intonation – again, a breeze. Measured with a gauge, the saddle radius is bang on 305mm (12 inches), which matches the fingerboard radius. Even though the strings are well stretched, you'll need to do that process again so everything beds in. Finally, the guitar is doing what it should and interestingly that bridge now barely rocks: those rollers are the only things that are moving. The pitch stability is excellent and I really don't understand why Gretsch doesn't fit this bridge as standard. A simple fix that completely changes your experience with a guitar.

Offset style

Recently I tested Vintage's latest distressed offset, the V65V. Whatever you think of its tattered appearance, here's a guitar that came out perfectly in tune, even after shipping in a far from substantial box. So we've switched to an offset vibrato, but we have what appears to be the exact same roller bridge now retrofitted to our Gretsch. There's a theme emerging…

The issue here is not one of friction but geometry. And when I say 'issue', it's actually part of the fun with this style – and as it's a bolt-on it's easy to experiment with. The flatter the angle of the strings from the bridge to the tailpiece, the more you'll hear those resonances as the strings vibrate behind the bridge. This is a key part of the offset sound for some but horrible for others. There's a plinkier, more banjo-like response, too, and there might simply not be enough down pressure to hold the strings in the saddles, especially if you have quite a vigorous right-hand technique. As supplied, the V65V sits very much in that lower back-angle camp.

To increase that angle we need to raise the bridge and increase the neck pitch with a simple neck shim. To tighten things up further you could also increase your string gauge – although that will probably mean some work to widen the nut grooves – but the neat thing about 'tuning' the guitar in this fashion is that you can experiment with a firmer conventional feel or that more resonating, slacker feel in a totally reversible way.

With the neck shimmed and the bridge raised in height, the feel of our Vintage V65V is firmed and the strings stay put in the roller saddles. A very simple fix

When it comes to upgrades, start with the basics and really assess any differences in sound

GAME PLAN

Is a PRS SE Starla a good candidate for a spot of modding? Why not, reckons Dave Burrluck

Q For my next challenge I'm looking to upgrade my relatively new PRS SE Starla Stoptail to see if I can make a good guitar better. What's your advice?

John, via email

A Firstly, I think you've made a good choice. The SE Starla Stoptail is a good lightweight single-cut guitar that is really quite a blank canvas in many ways. It's not trying to be a slab-bodied Les Paul, like a Special, and with its simple dual-humbucker, three-way lever switch, master volume and tone – all mounted on that large scratchplate – pickup swaps and improved wiring, and so on, are all easy to do.

Priced at $1,199 for 2022 (although you may get lucky and find it cheaper in-store), the SE Starla is slightly more expensive than the start-up PRS SE, the Standard, which can be bought for anywhere between $800 and $1000. Also, for this year there's just a single colour: black with a tortoiseshell scratchplate, although older stock might include Antique White and Frost Blue Metallic from 2020 and Power Blue from 2021.

Many SE owners like to simply replace the obvious parts with higher-grade components, and that's certainly one route to take. The PRS Guitars forum is full of tales of such upgrades and is a great place to engage with other modders. You could also use the SE not only to hone your modding skills but to listen and learn how upgrades affect the sound, and even the playability, of a guitar. For example, the SE Starla ships with 0.009 to 0.042 strings. Try going up a gauge, which may require a little nut work, perhaps a slight truss rod tweak, and then slightly adjusting the intonation. This might seem like basic stuff, but it's one of the foundations from which to learn. Get used to the slightly stiffer feel and then decide if there are any advantages or disadvantages.

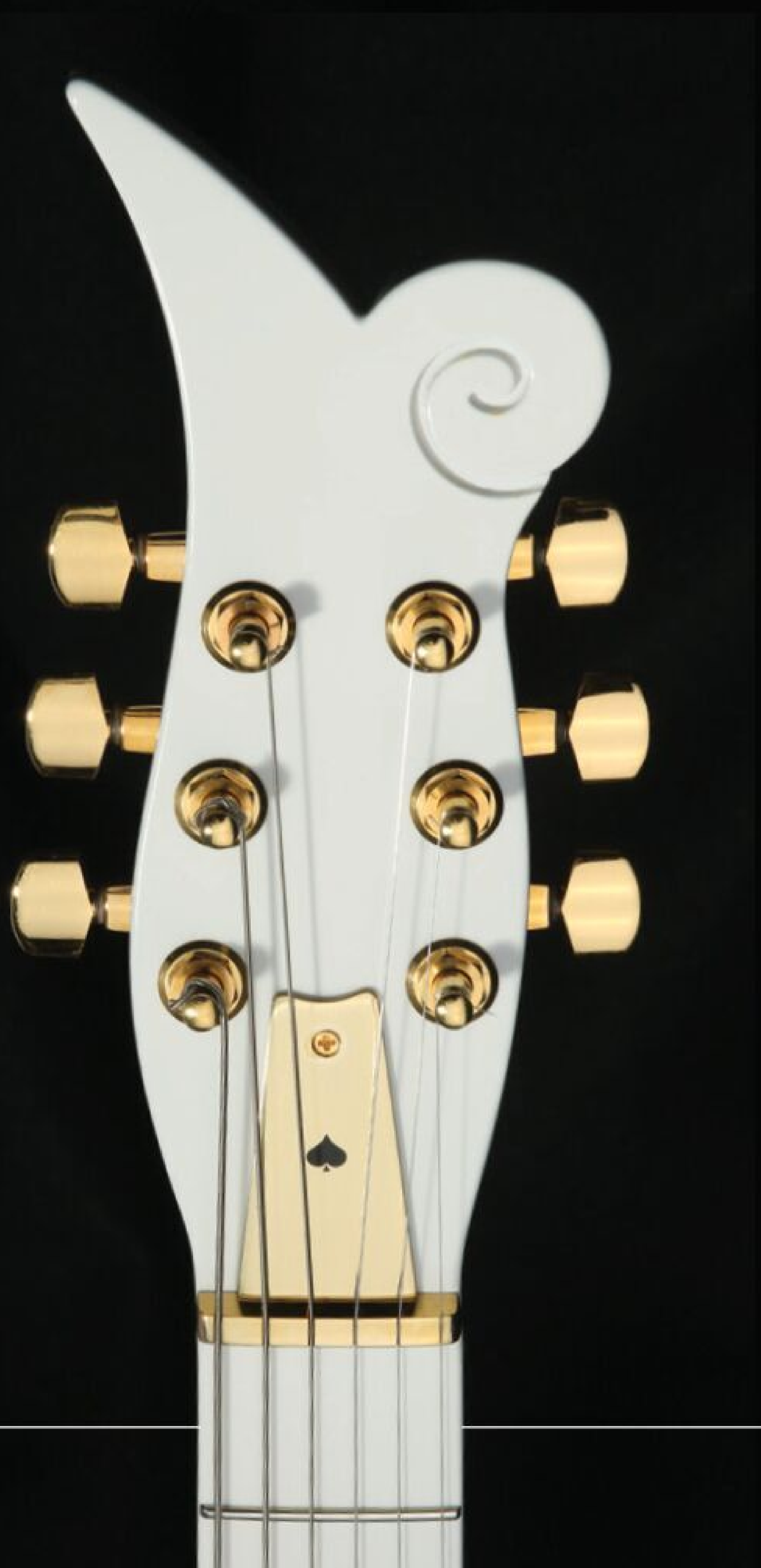
Another obvious mod is to swap out the pickups, but that can be quite a costly venture. Before you do that, I'd seriously suggest replacing the existing wiring with top-quality pots, a switch and a tone cap, which won't cost you a lot and allows you to hone your skills. Will it make the guitar sound better? Well, there's another exercise to learn from. Either way, you'd then have a pro-level wiring loom that isn't going to impair any new pickups you might fancy trying down the line.

Modding a new guitar is a big no-no for many, but not all of us want to take a risk on a well-used 'whatever', which might have less obvious issues, not least in the neck and fret departments. There's little doubt that PRS's SE-range models are some of the best budget instruments out there, as the latest SE Silver Sky has proved. Personally, however, I'd strongly suggest you live with the guitar as is for a while and really ask yourself the question: what's wrong with it, what don't you like?

For example, on our loaner SE Starla Stoptail, the appeal of the full-face scratchplate meant that after buying another scratchplate from PRS, I loaded in a set of PRS 58/15 'buckers and a similar circuit with coil-splits on the switched tone control. I added a TonePros bridge and locking studs for the tailpiece so I can just capo then slacken the strings, undo the locking studs and remove the tailpiece with the strings still attached. It's then a simple job to unscrew the original scratchplate and screw the new one in place, which is all a no-solder zone as I'd fitted Radioshop Pickups' volume controls with screw terminals. Just one way of using the style of the guitar to influence your modding – all in a totally reversible manner when PRS asks for it back!

VAPOR TRAILS

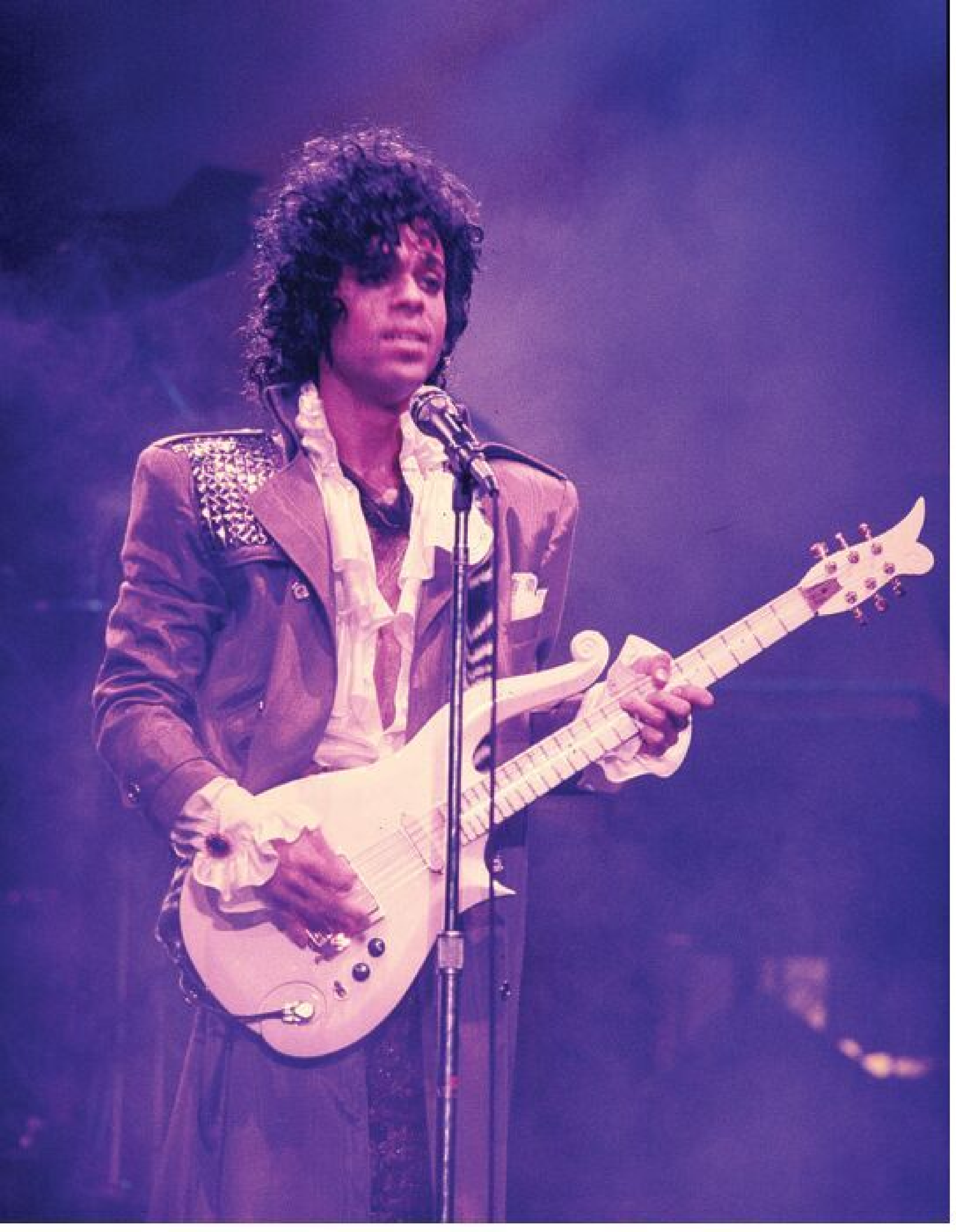
Nearly 40 years on, Dave Rusan's visionary Cloud guitar is a lasting presence in the gear world firmament.



IN THE WORLD of instantly recognizable custom guitars, perhaps none stands out more than the aptly named Cloud that Prince played in the final scenes of the 1984 film Purple Rain. Luthier Dave Rusan designed and built the Cloud, with its whimsical curves and distinctive prong on the upper bout. Rusan grew up in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, and became interested playing guitar as teenager. He says he didn't think of it as just a musical instrument, however, but as a beautiful and mysterious machine.

"Soon after my dad bought me my second guitar, a Mosrite, I took off the neck and removed the pickguard to see what was going on inside," he recounts. "I started modifying my guitars, but with almost no books to refer to, my efforts were based largely on trial and error. I improved, though, and was soon working on my friend's guitars. I felt I'd reached a major milestone when I finished my first re-fret."

Rusan was playing in "decent" bands in the Saint Cloud area, but, seeking to expand his horizons, he moved to Minneapolis to pursue the music scene there. "I found better musicians to work with and played all the major clubs," he says. "I had the opportunity to do session work at Sound 80, where Bob Dylan and Cat Stevens would do some recording. I also wanted to continue to pursue a career in guitar repair and started contacting music stores in the Minneapolis area. However, the owners of these stores were almost all at least a generation older than their customers, who played in rock



Prince onstage with a Cloud guitar in 1984 during his Purple Rain tour

bands. They had been in business for years, going back at least to the craze for accordions that had been engendered by *The Lawrence Welk Show* in the 1950s. It was like being in a store owned by your unhip uncle."

There was one music store that was cool, however, and it changed Rusan's life.

"Knut-Koupee Music was owned by two guys in their 20s who also played in bands, and it was a fun store and a hangout for rock musicians," he explains. "I offered to start a repair shop in the basement, which they agreed to, and I soon was working on the guitars of the hippest bands in town, including the Replacements, Hüsker Dü and the Suburbs. There was also a young kid, still in high school, who frequently came to the store and was rumored to be super-talented. One day he demonstrated it by riffing on a keyboard with his right hand while hammering a harmony part on a guitar with his left hand. "About a year later, I heard an even more impressive demonstration when David Z [*a.k.a. David Rivkin*], a local recording engineer and producer, played a recording on a boom box that he put on the counter. I remember saying, 'Wow, David, it looks like you discovered the next Earth, Wind and Fire!' He replied, 'Nope, it's all played by that kid with the Afro who always hangs out here.' The demo I heard that day got Prince a recording contract, and he was on the rise."

How did you begin working with Prince?

I did some setups and modifications to his Gibson L6S, as well as to an unusual custom bass guitar he'd bought in New York City. But then I got an opportunity to take a sabbatical from my position at Knut-Koupee and work at a store in the U.K. This was a dream come true, because it was a shop where many major British acts took their instruments for repair. I was soon working on guitars that belonged to the Rolling Stones, the Who and Def Leppard, and I got to spend some time with Gary Moore, Greg Lake and even Randy Rhoads.

Soon after I resumed my job at Knut-Koupee, I saw Prince at the counter talking to one of the owners, Jeff Hill. He told me Prince was going to star in a movie and he needed to have a custom guitar built

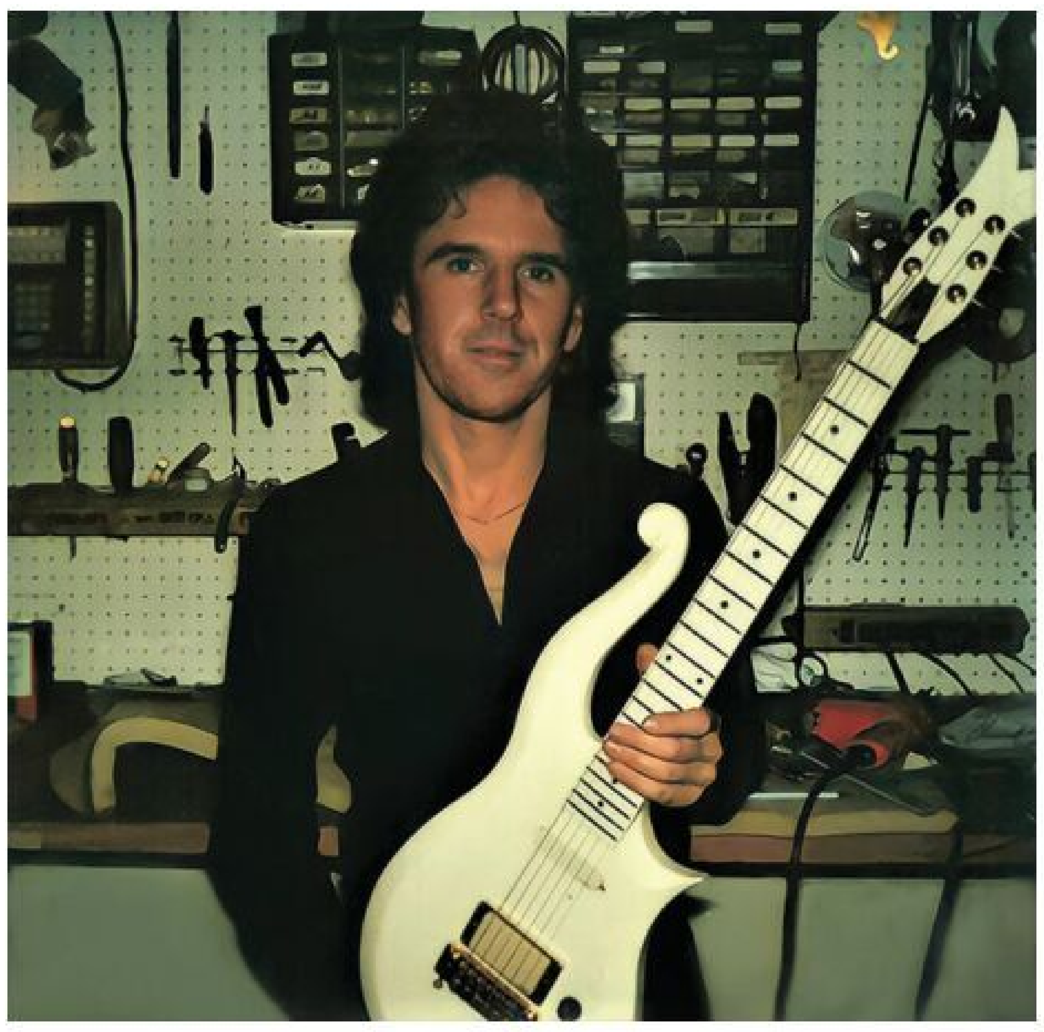
Dave Rusan holds a white Cloud guitar. (below) Rusan in the 1980s with one of the original Cloud guitars.

"Prince said he wanted it to be white, with gold hardware and EMG pickups. Otherwise I was on my own"

that would be part of the plot. But it would have to be done quickly, since the movie was already in production. Although by that time I was a competent repairman, I knew that guitar building is quite a different skill and different tools would be needed to accomplish the task. I contemplated declining the project, but I thought if I didn't give it a shot, I'd always regret it, so I accepted the challenge.

Did Prince tell you how he wanted the guitar to look?

His instructions were sketchy at best. At the time he often seemed painfully shy and talked as little as possible. He wanted design elements of his custom



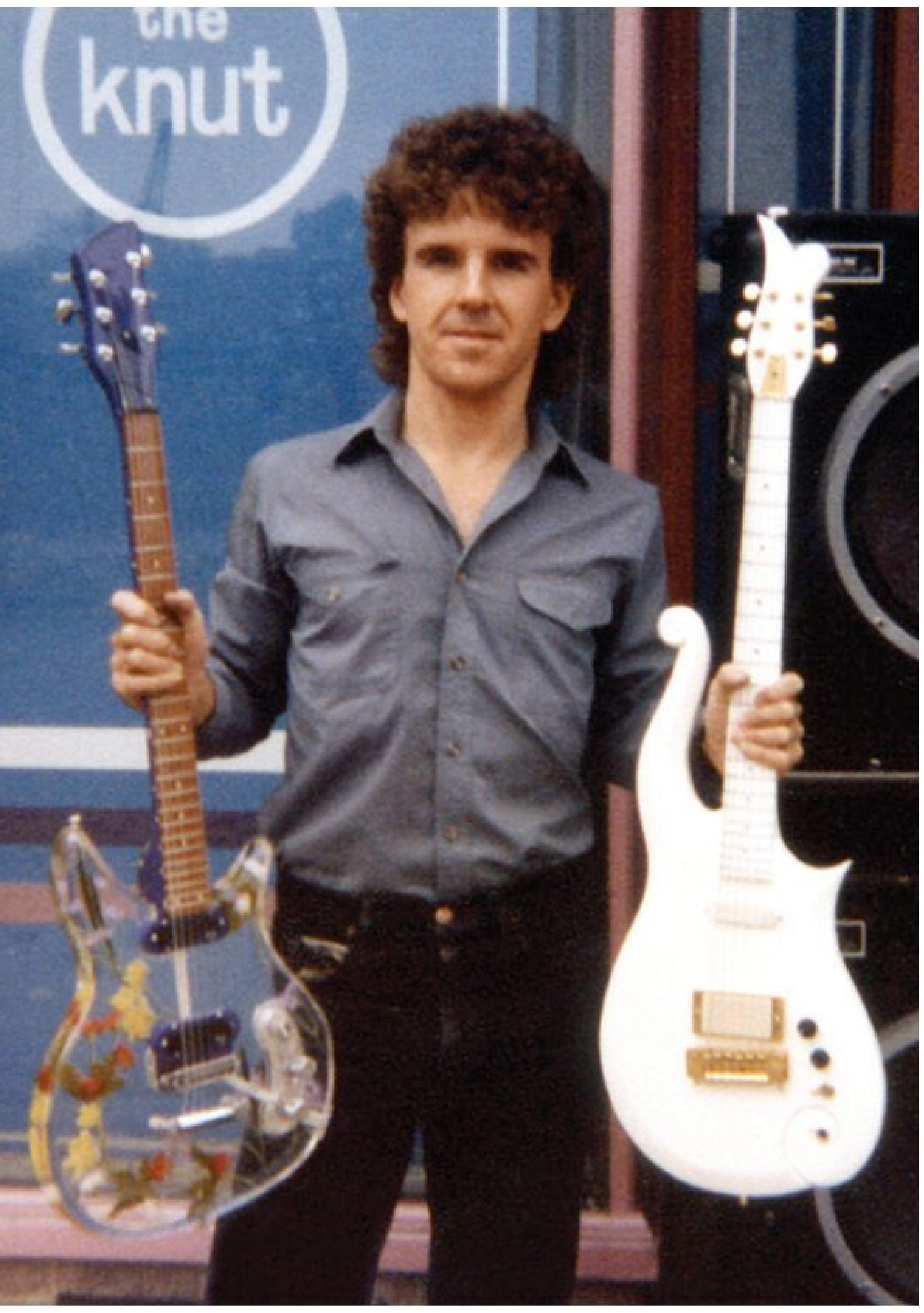
bass, such as the long horn, incorporated into this custom build, so I used that as my initial inspiration. He said he wanted it to be white, with gold hardware, and he must have already had some experience with EMG pickups, since he requested them. Otherwise, I was on my own, and all the decisions — such as neck size and shape, fret size and the myriad other things I would have wanted to discuss with him — were left for me to decide. I felt that the best plan was to make a guitar I would enjoy playing and

Richard E. Aaron/Redferns/GETTY IMAGES (PRINCE); ALL OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVE RUSAN

"Demand really picked up after Prince passed away, and I feel my work helps honor his memory"

hope that we both had the same taste.

I spent a lot of time making a step-by-step plan so that I wouldn't become overwhelmed by the task. Although I had already carved necks, I decided to use a neck from an unfinished guitar that was in the shop and shaped the headstock to my plans. I decided to make the body of hard-rock maple, because it wasn't going to be a large guitar that could get heavy, and the hardness of that wood could help it survive the abuse that Prince often inflicted on his stage guitars. Schaller hardware was top of the line at that time, so I used their bridge and tuners.



Rusan with a Cloud guitar and a custom clear-bodied guitar built for Prince guitarist Wendy Melvoin featuring silk flowers in a slab of clear Lucite and a Rickenbacker neck converted to a bolt-on. "Wendy thought it was too heavy and returned it to the store," Rusan says. It now resides in the Hard Rock Cafe Museum.

Were there any particular problems you had to overcome during the build?

The shop was poorly equipped for guitar building. There were a few items — such as a drill press, a band saw and a router — but none of the smaller specialized tools needed for this job, like chisels, a palm sander and a Foredom rotary tool. The body carving was quite a task. There have been very few guitars with such a complicated shape, and I had to bring it to life with a Dremel tool and sanding drums powered by a hand drill. I also had a belt sander that had been mounted on its side, which proved to be quite helpful. I really threw myself into the project, working six days a week for over a month.
Then, Tommy Stinson [*not the onetime Replacements bassist*], who mostly did finishing in the shop, took over to paint it. Nitrocellulose lacquer was used, which caused some problems, since the shape was hard to spray evenly, and clear buildup in certain areas caused the white to look a bit yellow, especially around the horn. When the finishing was done, I took over, removing the lacquer from the frets, installing the hardware and electronics and doing the final setup.

How did Prince react when he saw it?

He liked it a lot and used it in the movie's most important final scene. Prince seemed to enjoy playing the guitar, because he requested two more Clouds for the tour. I later made a fourth one that was given away in London by Warner Records in conjunction with a music-store chain.

Has your business changed over the years and are you still a one-man operation?

I still make these guitars by myself in my workshop. They're demanding to build for a solid-body instrument, but carving wood into a graceful shape is rewarding, and customers always tell me how much they appreciate them. The demand really picked up after Prince passed away, and I feel my work helps honor his memory. I've sent them all over the world, and my goals now are to achieve the highest level of attention to detail and playability I can muster, while keeping them true as possible to the originals. It hasn't been easy, because some of the products have changed or disappeared, but after almost 40 years I can still find a way to make it happen.

For example, the Schaller bridge I originally used was discontinued six years ago, so I have friends in Europe and Japan looking for new-old-stock ones. EMG changed the style of their logo about two years ago, so I had to have a special run commissioned, with the old logo printed on the pickups. Schaller also changed the logo on their tuners. Luckily, I found a guy on Reverb who had 50 new sets that he'd stored for 20 years, and I bought them all.

That's a lot of dedication. Have you updated anything?

One significant change I've made to the Clouds is the way that I install the frets. On the first one or two, I fretted them before the finish went on, which is common with painted fingerboards. This method requires removing the finish from the frets, and it can be difficult to make it look good when the fingerboard surface is a solid color rather than just clear coats. The height of the frets is also diminished by the buildup of the paint between them. I made at least one for Prince in which I installed the frets over tiny strips of veneer to add to their height. That worked pretty well but was quite labor intensive.

A few years ago I came up with a new method that, to my knowledge, has never been done: I fret the guitar before the finishing is done and bevel and shape the ends of the frets. Then I remove them and polish the ends. After finishing, I clean out the fret slots, reinstall the frets and do the leveling, being careful to center them on the fingerboard and not mar the polished ends. When I'm done, I have frets that look their best and have smooth, slightly recessed ends due to the extra thickness of the paint. It's clearly an improvement over every other method that I've tried. But I don't tell customers about this unless they ask, since some might prefer the method I used on the first guitars, even though the results were inferior.

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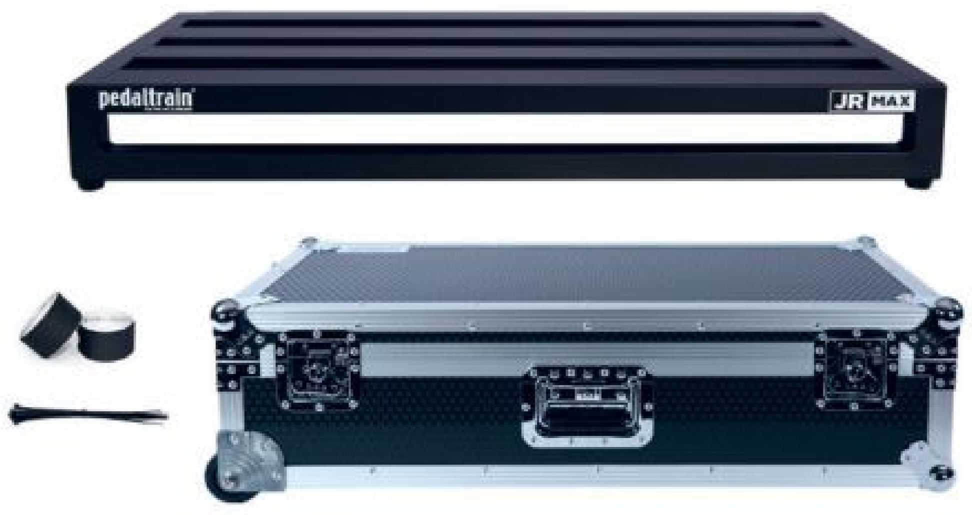

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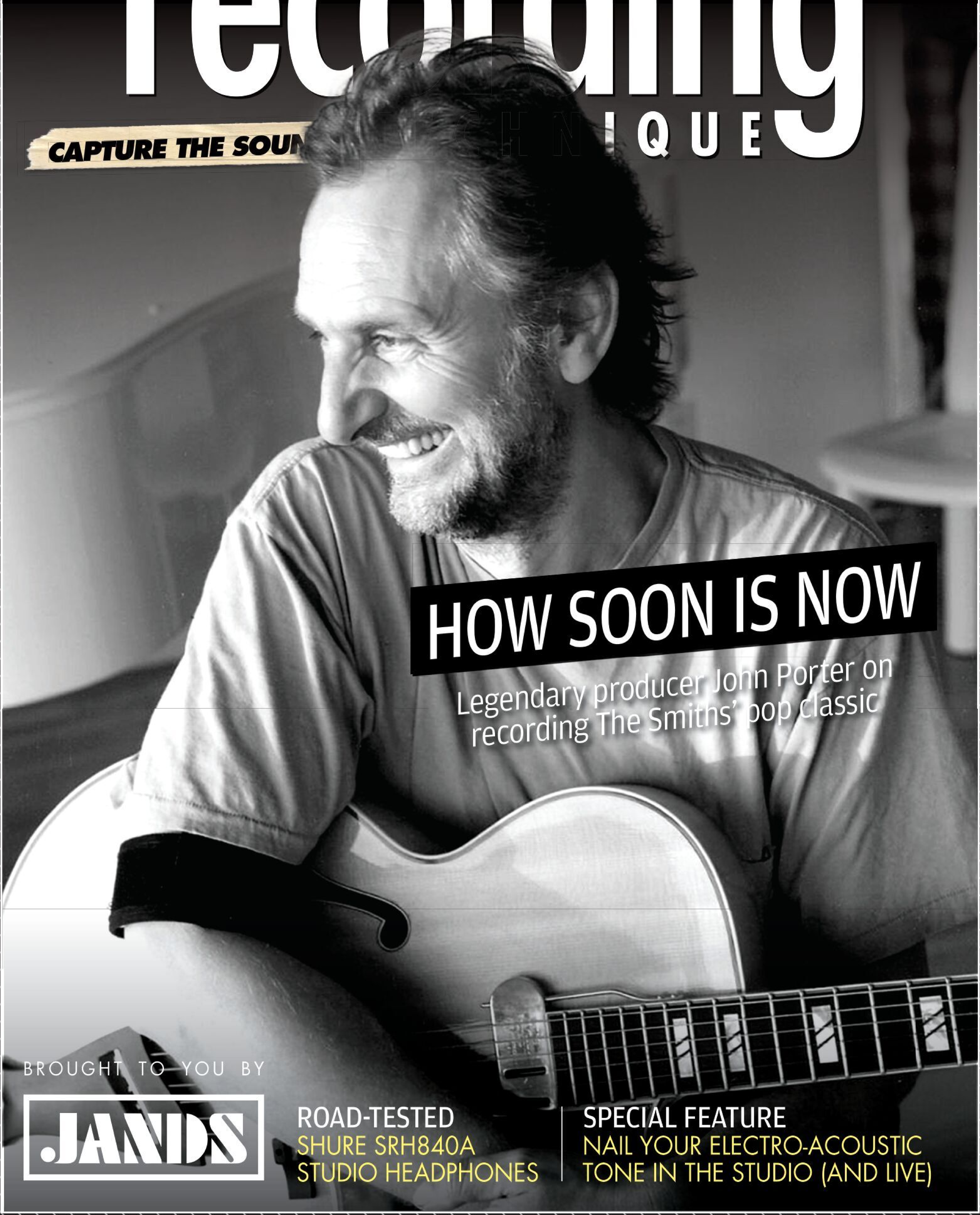

HOW SOON IS NOW

Legendary producer John Porter on recording The Smiths' pop classic

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EQ MATTERS

GET YOUR ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC TONE SPOT-ON WITH THESE 10 TIPS FOR RECORDED OR LIVE ACOUSTIC GUITAR SOUND.

Getting a good acoustic guitar tone isn't as simple as just plugging in and turning up; it requires a careful understanding of how EQ frequencies interact and function in a band. With that in mind, here are 10 top tips, divided into recording and live sound. Your six-string never sounded so good...

RECORDING EQ TIPS

1. LOSE THE LOWS

Regardless of mic, you'll probably want to lose everything below 50Hz, then sweep up from there to get rid of the rumble but keep the depth you desire. The busier the mix, the more excess bass will be an issue. Much above 100Hz and you'll be losing too much if cut completely.

2. TRIM THE LOWER-MIDS

If your mic is booming or 'woofing' a little bit around the soundhole, cutting frequencies between 100 and 300Hz can really help, giving the whole thing more poise and clarity.

3. BE CAREFUL WITH UPPER MIDS

The 'hi-fi' sound starts taking shape in the mids between about 800Hz and 2kHz if you go for a big cut. High-quality, smaller-body guitars can have plenty of strength here for lovely vintage-style sounds, but cheap guitars can sound exactly that without a bit of care in this area.

4. UP THE SPARKLE

Very similar to the live application, 2-5kHz is where you'll find sparkly treble for string articulation and liveliness. You can get a great lift in presence in the mix without having to increase the overall volume.

5. DON'T OVERDO IT

If you find yourself radically EQing things just to get a workable sound, you probably need to rethink the recording process. A few dB here and there is all you should need if you've got a decent guitar, a reasonable mic and the positioning there or thereabouts!

LIVE EQ TIPS

1. SHELVE THE LOWS

If you're playing with a band, don't be afraid to shelve off everything below 80Hz, maybe even 100Hz. These frequencies just clash with the bass and drums and make your band sound more muddy. This is what your high-pass filter is for.

2. REMOVE NASAL FREQUENCIES

Using an under-saddle pickup? Spend a little time using a parametric mid to sweep around 800Hz-2kHz to find where it sounds most nasal and nasty. Start by boosting those frequencies as you sweep, then when you've found the frequencies where you like it least, give it a serious cut.

3. CLEAR THE MUD

If you have a dual-source system with a mic inside the guitar, pay careful attention around 100-300Hz. This it where it can sound muddy and thick. Cutting a little bit across these frequencies can really help with clarity.

4. ADD CLARITY

A little boost between 2-5kHz can aid with clarity in the mix, without you having to turn up too much. It's a key vocal area too, of course.

5. SHAPE THE TONE

Don't have a graphic EQ or a parametric? You just need to balance the bass, mid and treble as best you can. Many acoustic amps have a 'shape' or 'tone' switch that will sound relatively less or more mid-scooped. Start with the EQ controls in the middle, find the switch setting that you like best and tweak from there.

PRODUCER JOHN PORTER REVEALS THE EXHAUSTIVE TONAL SCULPTING BEHIND THE SMITHS' 'HOW SOON IS NOW'

THE MAN BEHIND THE CONSOLE GOES DEEP ON THE CREATION OF ONE OF JOHNNY MARR AND CO'S MOST ENDURING HITS.

BY **MATT PARKER**.

John Porter is the British record producer responsible for work on a wide range of classic material, including Bryan Ferry, Billy Bragg, Missy Higgins, Killing Joke, The Cat Empire and, of course, The Smiths. Below, Porter describes the exacting – and ocassionally tense – work that went into recording The Smiths' classic song How Soon Is Now?

How did How Soon Is Now first come about?

We were in JAM Studios [recording William, It Was Really Nothing and Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want]. By that time, we had a good process. Johnny [Marr] and I had a musical connection, a good short-hand. It didn't take us long to get things into shape.

We still had another day or two, so I said, 'Well what else you got?' He played this little lick that was very similar to William, high and kind of fast. Now I had a bit of a bee in my bonnet about this, in that all of their songs tended to have lots of chord changes, whereas I was into black music, James Brown and The Meters and funk bands and the blues, where you'd stay on one chord for hours.

So I said, 'OK, let's just have a jam, but stay on one chord.' In those days they used to tune to F#, so they were doing this and it was nice just to hear him playing one chord.

Is that what became the main intro part?

Yes, but at this stage, there was no 'song'. It was just trying to do something that was a bit different. So I said to Johnny, 'That first lick you were playing, let's take that two octaves down and make it into a B-section. Stay on this one chord for ages, until you get bored of it, and then go into that.'

So that became the B-section and that is essentially the song. Once we had that, they recorded the sections twice, by which point I thought, 'OK we've got something here.'

It was all on two-inch tape and Mark Wallis was the engineer - a great engineer - so I then took the master tape and I went through the two takes and I took out all the bits that weren't any good and edited all the bits that were into one thing and that was the basis of the song.

That point was where the tremolo got introduced. It was like, 'This is kind of cool, but we can make the guitar sound better.' Johnny says different, but I think the initial guitar was into a DI, because I always took a DI when I recorded because it gives you so much more leeway afterwards, and I think we also always used the Roland Jazz Chorus.

Why did you use the Jazz Chorus as a go-to amp?

If you needed constant rhythm, just strumming, the Jazz Chorus used to give you this sort of harmonic sound. If you turned it up loud, you could hear things being suggested. We would sort of hear what was suggested by the guitar and say like, 'You hear those two notes coming up?' Let's bring those out and play those on top.'

So I think the initial guitar was a Jazz Chorus, just doing a stereo Roland Jazz Chorus-thing and a DI. Then I put the Jazz Chorus through this noise gate on the drum and triggered it with a cowbell and that gave us the basis of the tremolo. At some point, we put the DI out through the [Fender] Twins.

I remember there were three Twins, but Johnny says there were four. One was a blackface, but I also have a vision of a blonde Twin. I don't know why there would be so many Twins unless they were Johnny's.

We would hire stuff now and again, but I don't know why we would have hired three or four, but I may have done. My good pal Alan Rogan [best known as Pete Townshend's guitar tech] had lots of great amps and I used to get stuff from Alan and bring it down.

So how did you use the DI signal you sent to the Twins?

We went out into the studio and I asked Mark to play the track and we would try and chase it with the speed knobs. He had to give us plenty of the Linn drum cowbell in the headphones and we'd try and chase this thing.

Johnny was doing one and I was doing the other. We would do that until it dropped out and Mark would keep punching us in then stop and saying, 'No, it's gone out.' Then punch in again and we did that until we got a couple of passes and had this sound.

At some point, I said, 'Let's shore-up the B-section.' I was always into Leslies, so there's a Leslie guitar on slow, playing that. Then this

thing had a bit more of a life of its own. All of this stuff was done without any vocals at all.

How did the famous slide part come about?

The song was all on the I but it had these 'III IV' chord changes every eight bars or so. Morrissey would never allow backing vocals on Smiths records - I think only one time, maybe, with Kirsty [Maccoll on Ask] - and I thought it was missing out this huge area.

I started thinking, well, if The Beatles had done this, they would have done some 'oohs' and 'aahs' or something at that point in the song, so I would get Johnny to do a guitar part that would be the equivalent of having a backing vocalist.

I think I did the slide at that time [Marr has said he thinks he played it], on those III IV chords using a '54 Tele and an MXR Dyna Comp. I was thinking of The Beatles doing an 'aah'. I think there were two passes because there were two notes and one of them was minor third and one was a major third, so unless you're a monster guitar player, you've got to slide at a huge angle, to change the interval between the two notes.

I also always had harmonizers going, one up and one down, and so I harmonized on the root note add9 and on the third note, above it, and I think I harmonized something underneath. It was weird, but it sort of worked and then we bounced it all together.

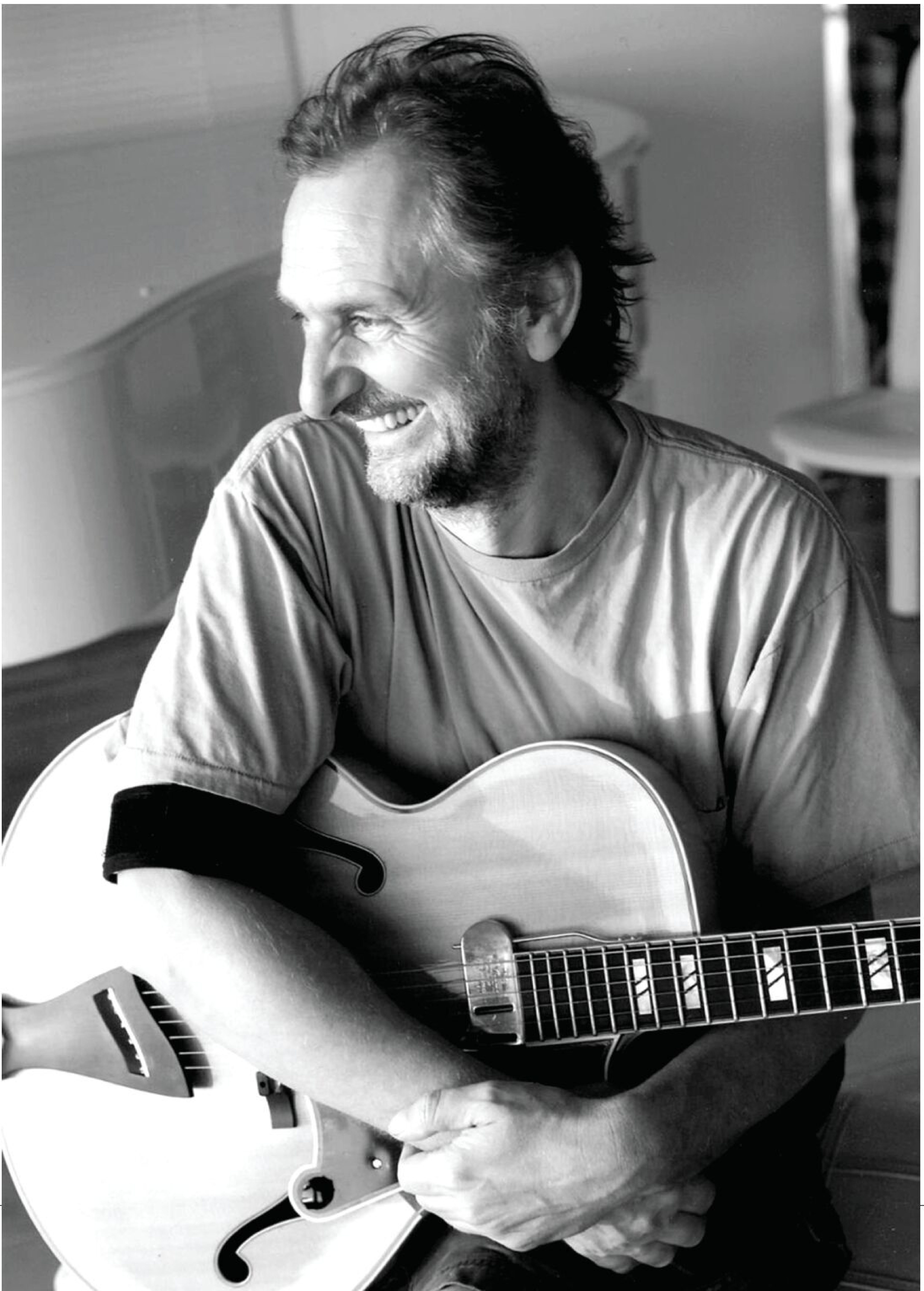
What was your reaction to the first mix?

I thought, 'This sounds fucking great. This is a breakthrough for The Smiths.' It must have still been relatively early on the Sunday evening, because I remember I called Geoff Travis up and said, 'You should come down to the studio, we've got something really exciting.'

I was really buzzed by this, I think Johnny was, too, and Geoff came down with Scott Piering from Rough Trade. I said to Geoff, 'What do you think?' and he looked at me like, 'What's this?' I was kind of enthusiastic and he took the wind out of my sails, completely. Scott, on the other hand, was saying, 'Yeah! This is fucking great, man!' It was this weird thing, where Johnny and I were really jazzed.

Scott was American, and I, as I said, wanted something that could cross over in America, and he was going, 'Yeah!' But Geoff was giving me this stony look. [Travis maintains he often tried to be impartial in the face of the studio adrenaline]

The next day, I got a call from Geoff, saying, 'Look, I'll put that track out as a B-side. But Morrissey doesn't like the 'OK' at the end... you'll have to take it out,' which in those days meant I had to completely remix it. It wasn't on recall, it wasn't a computer mix, so I said, 'OK...'



So where and how did you do the second and final mix?

I booked in at Eden [Studios] and because it was a computerized desk, an SSL, some of the things that Mark and I had done, I could refine much more. It didn't have to be all in one pass and the breakdown was much easier to do with a computerized desk, because you could mute the drums and the bass with a click, rather than having to whip it all down as quick as you could.

So I did the mix again. I was quite at home with an SSL - you could plug it all in to be triggered by the dynamics, so lots of stuff was being triggered by the drum. Every time you would hear this particular drum, it would open a gate and send to an echo, which would then go off to a delay. I was setting these incredibly complex chains of stutter at a level that as soon as you could just hear it, that was as loud as I would make it.

I did the mix and sent it off and, within a week or something, it came out. I thought they were crazy putting this out as a B-side, or I think it was as an extra track or something [as a bonus track on the 12" version of William, It Was Really Nothing].

I thought they'd wasted it and I was a bit pissed off at Geoff. So it came out as a B-side at one point and then I got the word that they were in the studio with somebody else.

Did Geoff or the band ever explain why you were fired, or rather, not rehired?

He did. He said he thought I was having too much influence on the band and that I was changing their sound too much, which in one sense, to me, was an affirmation that I actually did have something to do with it[s success]! They did get me back in later for a couple of singles. Johnny and I remained close friends. He was like my younger brother, I felt, we were really good pals, so Johnny and I would hang out and he used to tell me what was going on.

I think he probably called me and said they were going in the studio with somebody else. I think Morrissey didn't like the fact that Johnny and I were so pally. If we were in the studio for two days, then most of that time would just be Johnny and me.

Once Mike and Andy had done their thing they would go and Morrissey only came to sing. So I was pretty deflated. I thought they'd wasted it. Subsequently it came out again and then it came out again as a single and gradually over the years it became a stand-out thing, you know? But it still sounds good to me. I'm quite surprised at how good it does sound.

Shure SRH840A studio headphones

RRP: $399

THE MIC SPECIALIST PRESENTS AN UPDATED SET OF STUDIO CANS. WORDS BY BEN ROGERSON

Best known for its microphones, Shure is also a significant player in the world of studio headphones, both in the consumer and pro audio sectors. Shure's redesigned SRH440A and SRH840A edge towards the former category, but are still competitively priced.

Both sets of cans are designed to be more comfortable and durable than their predecessors, while looking a bit nicer, too. They're easy to tell apart; the SRH840As - which are on test here - differentiate themselves with some nice gold lettering on the backs of the earcups, along with gold bolts and stitching.

A good job, too, we say - if you're paying more for a set of headphones, you don't want them being confused with the cheaper model...

The SRH840As' packaging screams functionality rather than 'lifestyle' - it says on the box that they're designed for recording and content creation, and there's little in the way of marketing sloganeering. Lift the lid and, as well as the cans, you'll find a nice long (9-foot) cable - this locks into the left-hand earcup with a twist - a threaded gold stereo 1/8-inch to 1/4-inch adapter and a carry bag.

There's also a paper manual, though beyond a few safety and cleaning instructions, this doesn't tell you a great deal. That said, if you need instructions on how to use a pair of headphones this simple, you probably shouldn't be allowed in the studio in the first place.

These are closed-back cans, and come with 40mm neodymium dynamic drivers.

GOLD CLASS

We'd file the SRH840As' design as 'classy but conservative'. That gold lettering/stitching certainly adds a touch of exclusivity, and the overall feel and level of build quality is better than you'd get at the entry-level.

These are comfortable cans, too - light enough for you to wear for long periods at a time, but not so featherweight that you'll forget you've got them on. The leather-style earpads sit nicely on your ears without too much pressure - they swivel, giving you a bit of extra flexbility - and the band has plenty of cushioning when you're in it for the long haul.

The long cable is useful in the studio as you move around your gear, but would be annoying when you're on the move. If you want to use these headphones for commuting, you'll probably want to invest in a shorter one as well.

In use, the SRH840As are solid performers across the frequency spectrum, revealing plenty of mix details that you wouldn't be able to pick out with less capable headphones. We wouldn't say that their response is completely flat, though; there's a hi-fi quality to the sound, and you wouldn't describe it as clinical. This makes it very pleasing and easy on the ear - we enjoyed using the SRH840As for straight-up music listening - but not perfect for finalising mixes.

There's great isolation, though, which you'll appreciate if you're working in a noisy environment, and for the majority of studio tasks, including recording and monitoring, the SRH840As are admirable performers. Podcasters should be interested, too.

As such, we'd put these SRH840As firmly in the all-rounder category - a practical option that won't break the bank and will be useful in a wide variety of music-making and content creation situations. ag

▶ VERDICT

Excellent workhorse headphones that will do the job for recording and monitoring in the studio.

▶ PROS

- **Pleasing, detailed sound.**
- **Comfortable to wear for long periods.**
- **Long, locking cable.**

▶ CONS

- **Not the best for finalising mixes.**

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PRICE: $549 / $499

FENDER SCALES UP TWO OF ITS PEDALBOARD FAVORITES AND PRESENTS PLAYERS WITH SOME SERIOUSLY TWEAKABLE STOMPBOX ESSENTIALS. REVIEW BY **PAUL RIARIO**

Once you discover the bevy of stompboxes Fender has brought to the effects party since 2018, you may wonder, where was my invitation? Well, I say it's never too late to get in on the action, because two of them – the Marine Layer Reverb and the Pugilist Distortion – seem to have noticeably struck a chord among many players in the know.

But now Fender has decided to take a "more the merrier" approach to this shindig by releasing the Dual Marine Layer Reverb and Duel Pugilist Distortion. Both duplicate the original pedals' control sets (combined with unique options and special features) for two independent settings or voicings that you can footswitch between in a single dual-format stompbox, proving it's much better to double your pleasure.

Both stompboxes come in a lightweight anodized aluminum housing with Fender's standout fitting of LED-backlit knobs that illuminate brightly.

Like the original, the Dual Marine Layer Reverb offers the same Hall, Room and Shimmer reverbs selected via a three-position "Type" mini-switch. But now there are more options: you can now set up separate reverb channels (Reverb A and B) using the two sets of identical controls for Damping, Time, Mod (chorus modulation) and Level, and engaging the "Reverb" footswitch to toggle between those presets.

There's no stereo out for the DMLR, but the novel "Sustain" momentary footswitch and its knob is a thoughtful inclusion for ambient prolonging of the reverb's decay time.

The Duel Pugilist Distortion offers the same heavy-duty dual gain as the original, but this newer model arrives with two independent distortion circuits (Distortion A and B) with Level, Tone and Gain controls for each, and separate footswitches (A and B).

The real show-stopper is the "Mode" switch for three versatile "routing" options: Mute, Series and Bypass (Parallel). Mute allows for crafting one distortion (A) and the ability to layer an additional one (B) on top of it for more burly complexity similar to a boost.

Series is your typical mode for stacking two distortions as if they were two separate pedals, and Bypass enables you to blend two different distortions from the A and B circuits using the onboard Blend knob, or even a clean sound with a distorted tone. For additional tonal sculpting, the DPD includes a master shelving EQ with High and Low controls.

There's been an uptick and fervor for reverb pedals that go past the cavernous depths in favor of ones that reach deep space and beyond. And if the outer limits of 'verb is your destination, then the Dual Marine Layer Reverb may fall short of your expectations, but that's not to say it should be overlooked.

If anything, the Dual Marine Layer Reverb is an immersive reverb meant to enhance your guitar tone, and one where you can easily craft expressively ambient and dreamlike 'verbs that can be infinitely sustained.

The way I hear it, deep, deeper and deepest (with reflections), is the best way to describe the Room, Hall and Shimmer reverbs respectively – but keep in mind, you can only choose one reverb "type" to footswitch between your two presets.

No matter what reverb you select, turning the Damping and Time knobs clockwise will generate a chasmic and dimensional sound with shorter and tighter reverb tails, but decreasing the Damping knob counterclockwise (toward no damping) will provoke a sustained and drifting reverb tail that many shoegazers will find musically useable, and holding down the Sustain footswitch will hold down that regenerative shimmer endlessly.

Another highlight is the Mod knob for its warm choral effect that never leans toward syrupy or detuned, and keeping it midway makes your reverb tone pleasantly lush without sounding overly affected. For its airy wash of reverbs it provides, not to mention having two footswitchable settings at your disposal, I find the Dual Marine Layer Reverb to be an essential bread-and-butter reverb rather than one of those special-effects generators.

For the pedal purveyors that deal in dirt, most (like myself) will find the Duel Pugilist Distortion a satisfyingly worthy contender in the middleweight distortion division. Obviously, more is always more, and having two distortions in one pedal with multiple operating modes makes the DPD an enticing gain box.

For one, the DPD doesn't sound like anything else as far as other distortions go; it sits somewhere between a beefed-up overdrive and a fat distortion that crunches with plucky grind, all while retaining firm note definition.

It's quite a musical gain that could replace your favorite overdrive because you can dial it back to achieve much of that Screamer-vibe but without the mid-heavy coloration. And, of course, if you want it to sound ferocious, it does that too, but metalers may want to look elsewhere.

It has quite a spectrum of gain, and depending on how you route its signal path from its Mode switch, you can use it as a boost or blend or stack it to get plenty of chunky sustain. I loved using it as two separate distortion pedals with the ability to get more filthy as I switched between the A and B footswitches. ag

VERDICT

The Dual Marine Layer Reverb and Duel Pugilist Distortion double up on the control set of their original namesakes as 2-in-1 stompboxes with exceptional tones and versatility.

PROS

- The Duel Pugilist offers a unique blend of overdrive and distortion.
- The Dual Marine is a superb option for everyday reverb.
- Hardy builds.
- Expanded feature sets.

CONS

- Soundscape artists might might a more niche reverb.
- Metal maniacs might want a more crazy high-gain distortion.
- They are quite large pedals.

CONTACT

FENDER AUSTRALIA
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com/en-AU/

BOSS GX-100 Guitar Effects Processor

BOSS IS BACK WITH ITS LEANEST, MEANEST MULTI-EFFECTS FLOORBOARD YET – NOW WITH TOUCHSCREEN CONTROL. REVIEW BY **ALEX LYNHAM**

BOSS is the king of stompboxes, but when it comes to multi-effects, there has been room for improvement. While the sounds are exemplary, the effects giant's GT interface can feel a little complex and difficult to work with compared with its contemporary competitors. Can the company's first touchscreen-enabled floor processor change that?

The short answer is yes: setting up patches on the GX-100 feels noticeably more streamlined than previous BOSS offerings. When editing parameters, you can either tap and use the quick-adjust pots along the bottom, or move to knob mode, where all parameters are shown on screen – besides dialling in sounds, it's seriously handy for setting up the pedal's myriad footswitch assign and MIDI control functions, as well.

Even if you might still need to refer to the manual on occasion, once you've got the hang of the drag-and-drop signal routing, it's clearly superior to the chain building on previous BOSS multi-FX units.

The modelling – which packs a host of sounds from BOSS's flagship GT-1000 – is as strong as expected. Though there are fewer amp models than some of the competition, those that are here are dynamic and responsive – these sims are almost indistinguishable from the real thing. Their only tell is the lack of problem frequencies: they're just a bit too perfect, but for many players, that will be a plus

The GX-100's real highlight is its effects – they sound great out of the box, and even as you tweak and combine them, you'll struggle to make them sound bad. Side-by-side, the delay, reverb and modulation patches are as good, if not better than those on the BOSS 500-series units. When combined or stacked in a virtual chain, boosts and drives react in a very realistic way, and setting up parallel chains is a breeze. They sound great in front of a real-life tube amp, too.

Using the GX-100's models and going direct in isn't any less inspiring or dynamic than playing through physical amps. That's especially true with the ability to easily set up multi-amp and stereo rigs – lugging around a pair of combos is no fun, so this is an area where amp sims really have the edge. Whether it's to blend a Marshall-esque crunch and a Vox-style chime, or simply to use a wet/dry signal chain, the results are excellent.

While it might take a bit of learning, it's easy to reconfigure the GX-100 to match your preferences. The chain building is still a bit behind some of the competition, but the sounds are next-level. Even if you don't think you'll need all the amp modelling features, its extra DSP horsepower shows when using the numerous overdrive and distortion models.

Elsewhere, the delay, reverb and modulation effects are as outstanding as you'd expect from the most prolific guitar effects maker in the world. All in all, it's BOSS's best multi-effects and amp processor yet.

▶ VERDICT

A smart new touchscreen interface and some awe-inspiring amp and effects models make the GX-100 BOSS's best multi-effects floorboard to date.

▶ PROS

- Touchscreen interface is a big step up.
- Excellent, responsive amp models.
- Superlative effects.

▶ CONS

- Interface still takes a bit of getting used to.
- Not as many amp models as rival processors.

▶ CONTACT

ROLAND AUSTRALIA
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Web: roland.com/au

IK Multimedia AmpliTube X-Vibe

FROM PLUGINS TO PEDALS, AMPLITUBE SOUNDS ARRIVE IN PHYSICAL FORM FOR ALL YOU PEDALBOARD ENTHUSIASTS OUT THERE. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**

IK Multimedia, the maker of the long-established AmpliTube guitar amp and effects emulation software, has introduced a series of four X-Gear pedals. There's one each for modulation, reverb and delay, and the X-Drive, for drive, distortion, fuzz and so on.

The X-Gear pedals have the same three-footswitch form factor with mono and stereo connectivity and full MIDI implementation. Each has 16 algorithms and up to 300 savable presets that can be managed with the included librarian app and used in AmpliTube 5.

In addition, the necessary USB computer connection lets the pedal function as an audio interface for recording, with or without cab sim. While basically preset-based, the pedals have physical knobs to quickly adjust the main controls, while several more are accessed with a push-and-turn parameter knob.

Presets and banks are easily recalled for live use and you get some useful performance features, such as being able to add an expression pedal and the X-Mode facility, which momentarily alters a parameter by holding down a footswitch.

The X-Vibe modulation pedal's three chorus algorithms offer pretty comprehensive cover, including good representations of the classic Boss chorus sound. For phasing and flanging, there is a range of very usable tones such as emulations of the Phase 90, Phase 100, Small Stone, Electric Mistress and MXR 117, plus a Uni-Vibe with both its chorus and vibrato modes available.

Speed change in the Rotary emulation is disappointingly limited to the X-mode ramping up to the maximum speed while the footswitch is held, although you could place slow and fast presets side by side on the pedal for an abrupt change between them.

The Tremolo is generic but has all the necessary tools to shape a great sound, particularly in changing wave shape. Not as conventional as the rest, there's the Step Slicer, which is great for making use of the tap tempo and throwing in some nice solo rhythmic effects, while Step Filter is a little more quirky in its synth sequencer stylings. ag

▶ VERDICT

All the modulation effects you'll need, if you only use them one at a time.

▶ PROS

- Massive range of classic modulation sounds.
- Presets easily saved and recalled.

▶ CONS

- Speed changes in rotary mode are a bit disappointing.

▶ CONTACT

SOUND & MUSIC
Ph: (03) 9555 8081
Web: sound-music.com

Faith Blue Moon Venus

FAITH EXTENDS ITS VENUS RANGE TO INCLUDE THIS OM/AUDITORIUM-STYLE ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC MADE FROM GLORIOUS FIGURED MANGO. REVIEW BY **DAVID MEAD**

Way back in 2020 Faith released the Blue Moon Neptune, an exotic acoustic that had a shelf-load of virtues in the tonal stakes. With this newer acoustic guitar we've travelled a few planets closer to the sun, but the basic concept is really very similar.

The Neptune introduced us to figured mango as a body wood, a theme that is continued here. Obviously this is a new voice in the acoustic field and, tone being a desperately subjective thing to describe, we'll turn to Faith's official voice on the matter.

"It is not as loud and punchy as rosewood nor as straightforwardly mellow as mahogany, yet it bears its own distinctive warmth… the overall tone could be described as dark and moody."

We'd certainly agree that the deep-blue hue of the Venus hits the dark and moody criteria on the nose, with the wild figuring of the mango wood underneath just managing to show through – a subtle statement as opposed to a bold one.

It's a good-looking guitar, without the decorative clout of some of the exotic woods we've encountered, but it has a great deal of charm, nonetheless. The body's flamed maple binding acts as a good contrast to the darkness of the top, back and sides, as does the abalone rosette.

When we leave the confines of the guitar's body, things return more to a standard theme in the construction department. The neck is mahogany, the fingerboard Macassan ebony – but you're probably as curious about the instrument's tone as we were and so here goes…

There's certainly no lack of volume here and there's also a good balance between treble and bass, albeit sonically on the dark side as Faith has promised. A 43mm nut means the guitar will appeal more to the bold strummer as opposed to fingerstyle gymnast, and the neck feels quite substantial in the hand. More of a vintage vibe than a contemporary thin 'n' skinny situation, if you see what we mean.

Stage readiness is taken care of by Fishman's very stylish INK3 under-saddle pickup and preamp combo. Flush volume, treble, middle and bass controls will help you dial in your sound while the onboard – very brightly illuminated – tuner will help keep you in tune in even the darkest environment. Bottom line? Another habitable planet in Faith's solar system. ag

▶ VERDICT

Stage-ready with a balanced sound and a feel that will welcome a wide range of styles, the Blue Moon Venus is another fine addition to the Faith lineup.

▶ PROS

- Unusual but visually appealing acoustic. A sound very much its own.

▶ CONS

- Dark and moody might not be everyone's cup of tea.

▶ CONTACT

CMC MUSIC
Ph: (02) 9905 2511
Web: cmcmusic.com.au

PRICE: $2,299

Fender Player Plus Meteora HH

FIRST SEEN IN 2018, THE METEORA ISN'T JUST A RE-RUN OR MASH-UP OF PAST FENDER DESIGNS. IT'S A RADICAL NEW 'SHAPE' WITH MAXIMUM OFFSET STYLE. WOULD YOU ROCK ONE?
REVIEW BY **DAVE BURRLUCK**

Originally conceived by Fender designer Josh Hurst, the Meteora model first appeared in the initial Parallel Universe range and was released late in 2018. That release featured the body we see here but with more Tele-style pickups and appointments. According to Fender, Josh "wanted to make something that was revolutionary while also recalling Fender's rich history". "To introduce something so unique to Fender," Josh commented at the time, "you have to introduce it in a familiar package."

The following year things had changed and the Meteora HH made a return in the lower-cost Alternate Reality Series. This time around it featured a less heritage-style design with twin (Player Series) humbuckers, a tune-o-matic bridge and through-body stringing. Now, for 2022, it's back as a regular model in the upmarket Player Plus range.

Fender's original offset, the Jazzmaster, has had a significant influence on guitar makers large and small over the years. A common theme is to downsize that elongated body – which helps to keep weight in check – and simplify the feature set to a pair, or three, of more common pickup designs. The Meteora is no different. Yes, the body shape is out-there, a radical offset, but the actual construction – alder body, bolt-on maple neck, vibrato – is thoroughly Fender. And while this mainstream debut features dual humbuckers, they're in Fender style with the three-plus-three polepiece design that harks back to Seth Lover's original 'Wide Range' design. The two-post vibrato, a first for the Meteora, follows the specification of the Player Plus Stratocaster rather than the offset's original two-piece design.

The Meteora's appearance in Fender's Player Plus series is significant, too. Launched in 2021, the series could easily be seen as the most modern-style Mexican-made range, mirroring more the style of the USA Ultra at a much lower price point. Like other Player Plus models, the Meteora HH comes in some pretty bold colours: our metallic green Cosmic Jade and a Belair Blue fade, both with pau ferro 'boards, while the black-to-grey Silverbust comes with a maple 'board along with and a good ol' traditional and gorgeous 3-Color Sunburst.

Aside from its shape, the Meteora also introduces the new Fireball humbucking pickups (see Under The Hood opposite), which are selected by a Gibson-style three-way toggle switch. Each pickup can be simultaneously split, voicing the outerfacing coils of each humbucker, via the S-1 push-switch within the master volume control's knob. We also get a tone control for each pickup.

Feel & Sounds

It might not look like one, but the Meteora certainly feels like a Fender. It's a standard weight at 3.86kg, slightly heavier than both the Player Plus Strat and Tele. The 'modern C' neck has a satin back with a 305mm fingerboard radius and nicely rounded edges. In depth, it's mainstream: 21.2mm at the 1st fret and 22.5mm by the 12th. Again, that pau ferro fingerboard doesn't capture the deep brown of classic Indian rosewood, but it's a perfectly good fingerboard material, although the position dots are a little low in contrast to the pau ferro – maybe brighter solid white or even more opaque 'clay' dots would be better?

In terms of feel, it's much more normal than it might appear. Strapped on, you might well forget what you're playing, and it's actually little different sitting down. Clearly, this is a well-considered design, though obviously you can't lean it against your amp and you'll need to consider what stand you can use.

Now, giving a pickup a name like Fireball suggests plenty of poke, but that's not what we hear here. In fact, these humbuckers seem like quite close cousins to the identical-looking Shawbucker pickups we found on the American Professional Telecaster Deluxe Shawbucker back in 2017. They 'clonk' like an unpotted pickup when you hit the cover, although Fender tells us that the team "went with a double potting method, so both the coils and cover are potted".

So, fire-breathing metal they are not. Both pickups measure in the mid 7kohms range and, not dissimilar to an early Gibson T-Top, they combine clarity with enough power for light classic crunch on a cleaner amp. These are nothing like 15k 'hot' pickups. It means the coil-splits, which voice the outer coils of each pickup, however, do sound rather thin – not least when you compare them with real single coils – but they certainly work as a thinner option. But it's the humbucking mode that gets more play time here. If you like lower-output 'buckers, especially designs from Gretsch or Guild, then you'll definitely be at home.

Although the DCR measurements of the pickups are pretty much the same, they're actually well balanced between the bridge and neck positions, while the master volume and two-tone setup is rather Stratocaster-like. Mind you, we couldn't help thinking that lower-profile knobs might work better – these Tele-style knurled knobs do seem a little high.

While plenty of us obsess about vintage-accurate details, the Player Plus guitars released so far have impressed us as very fit-for-purpose instruments. The addition of this Meteora to the range doesn't change that one bit: it might look a bit outthere, but it feels surprisingly normal and the sounds we hear have plenty of appeal. ag

▸ VERDICT

A slightly beefier but far-from-hot Fender that's very pedalboard friendly indeed. Perhaps not one for the blues jammers, but, then again, why not?

▸ PROS

- Surprisingly comfortable shape.
- Weight.
- Excellent low-output humbucking sounds.

▸ CONS

- A divisive shape.
- Coil splits are on the thin side.

▸ CONTACT

FENDER AUSTRALIA
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PRS SE Silver Sky

PRS AND JOHN MAYER UNLEASH THE AFFORDABLE SE VERSION OF THE SILVER SKY. ANOTHER CHEAP FENDER COPY OR ONE OF THE BEST SIGNATURE GUITARS WE'VE EVER PLAYED?
REVIEW BY **DAVE BURRLUCK**

Whatever our (or your) feelings are about the validity of the Silver Sky – PRS's cover version of an absolute Fender classic in collaboration with John Mayer – it's very hard to argue with the instrument we have in front of us.

While the USA Silver Sky sits more than comfortably alongside Fender's top-of-the-line production models, not to mention virtually every other high-end bolt-on, this new SE version is simply one of the finest examples of large-production guitar making we can recall.

This is certainly a very close rendering of the USA model, but there are numerous differences necessary to bring the guitar in at its downsized price point. First off, its specification tells us the body here is poplar – not alder like the USA guitar – though you can't see that under the yellow-blonde Moon White finish, one of four options.

Aside from the extra dishing in the treble cutaway and rounded nose to the heel, there's little variation from the classic blueprint. Of course, if you draw around a Fender then do the same here you'll see some differences, notably the slightly deeper bass-side cutaway, a less protruding heel and, of course, the trademark scoop in the treble cutaway.

Four years on from its launch and we've certainly got used to the Silver Sky's reverse and back-angled PRS headstock. The vintage-style tuners, with their silver plastic buttons matching the truss rod cover, not only function perfectly but like any good guitar we rarely touch them. And not only is this a typically in-tune guitar, it stays that way.

The nut looks oversized for the style, but this is PRS and there's a reason: it sounds better. No, it's not real bone like the USA models, it's a synthetic bone – the formulation of which was carefully chosen by PRS – and is cut superbly and certainly doesn't impair the vibrato.

The pickup selector switch cap is a redesign but barely affects anything. We still get the exact same pickup selections on the five-way pickup selector as the time-honoured Strat: the centre control (tone 1) works on both the neck and middle pickups; the lower control (tone 2) is solely for the bridge pickup.

The engagement with this guitar, and why it feels more expensive than it actually is, is simply down to its lightly golden tinted satin-finished neck. The headstock is scarf-jointed to the main shaft, just like PRS's USA bolt-on models, and here the two pieces are nicely matched.

The fret slots are filled on the fingerboard edges and the 'board is actually a nice dark classic rosewood; we're fans of these smaller and more subtle bird inlays, too. The slight rounding of the neck heel and the PRS trademark scoop on the treble horn all just help to make high-fret access very comfortable.

Soundwise, there's a balanced fullness to the voice that you hear unplugged, which certainly suggests the guitar is working as one. Even the way that the vibrato is set up seems to enhance what we hear. The high-end especially isn't over-sharp or clangy. We'd call it sweet, a little softer than we hear from a heavier ash-bodied Strat reference. There's obvious depth, too.

Plugged in, well, it sounds like a Strat and we all have our favourites. First off, there's a pretty good balance from neck to bridge, which isn't always the case. Obviously, you can tweak the pickup heights to suit your idea of a great Strat sound, but like virtually every other facet of this guitar, we don't feel we want to touch a thing, even though the pickups (treble to bass) are tilted less than most of our references.

Since 1985, PRS has probably done more than any maker to raise the level and art of guitar making. There are few makers – from one-man workshops to full-blown production manufacturers – that haven't been paying attention. It was once believed within the company that the offshore SE line would somehow devalue that craft.

Many of us would beg to differ, of course, but if proof were still needed, here it is. There is nothing cut-price here and the quality of build, feel and sound blurs – perhaps even erases – the whole country of origin consideration. It's not where but how that's important.

▶ VERDICT

This new take on John Mayer's signature Silver Sky is the best PRS SE guitar yet. It's hugely impressive in all regards, and affordably priced, too.

▶ PROS

- Price, build, playability, sound. Great neck shape.

▶ CONS

- Only four colour options.

▶ CONTACT

ELECTRIC FACTORY
Ph: (03) 9474 1000
Web: elfa.com.au

RRP: $1,239

Cort G290 FAT II

COR-TEK ALREADY MAKES A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF THE WORLD'S ELECTRIC GUITARS, BUT CAN ITS OWN BRAND, CORT, COMPETE WITH THOSE BIGGER NAMES? WE THINK SO.
REVIEW BY **DAVE BURRLUCK**

Back in issue 143, we were very impressed with the Cort G300 Pro, not least with its stainless-steel frets, roasted maple neck and Seymour Duncan humbuckers. The G290 FAT II – a V2 update of the model that was introduced a couple of years back – sits slightly below the G300 Pro, price-wise. It retains that guitar's sleek offset Strat-inspired body outline, and is now made from alder instead of light ash. It has a figured maple 'top' that you can clearly see, but it's just a veneer, whereas the G300 Pro goes for a basswood body with a 6mm maple cap.

The main upgrade to the new FAT II model is that, like the G300 Pro, we now have a roasted maple neck and fingerboard, although here it has 22 not 24 frets, which are standard nickel-silver not stainless steel. We get new glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots, too, and – like its previous version, and the G300 Pro – we have a compound 305mm to 400mm radius to the fingerboard face with a 'spoke wheel' truss-rod adjuster at the body end.

The build is very tidy. The neck is held with four recessed screws on a contoured heel, for example. The bright chromed hardware includes rear-lock tuners, with staggered height posts, and the CFA-III two-post six-saddle vibrato with push-in and tension-adjustable arm uses stainless steel for the saddles, top plate and shaped, deep-drilled block. The only criticism we have is that the finishing in the vibrato back rout is a little scrappy, lighter in colour with some flecks of visible white polishing compound that hasn't been cleaned.

The electronics are retained from the earlier G290 FAT: a set of Cort 'Voiced Tone' VTH77 covered humbuckers that are direct-mounted but height-adjustable thanks to a combination of hard foam and springs underneath each pickup. The five-way lever offers bridge, both and neck in positions 1, 3 and 5, while position 2 voices the outer single coils of both in parallel; position 4 does the same but with the inner coils.

While the guitar does veer to the generic modern 'SuperStrat' side, this means it feels instantly comfortable and familiar. It's a good weight for the style, slightly heavier than the G300 Pro, but that's not surprising bearing in mind the different body wood. The fretwork is superb from a pretty standard medium jumbo wire (approximately 2.73mm by 1.14mm high), and aside from just needing slightly lower string grooves in the nut, it's hard to fault.

You might look at the spec and believe the fingerboard is too flat for you, but it doesn't come across like that at all. The fingerboard edges are lightly rolled and it feels very similar to Fender's Player Plus. In terms of depth it's pretty mainstream, too – 21mm at the 1st fret and 23mm at the 12th, slightly thicker in the upper neck than the Player Plus. It has what feels like a C-meets-D profile, whose fuller shoulders make it feel a little bigger than it actually is. The neck back is satin and will quickly burnish up to a dull sheen, or you can easily rub it with a fine Scotch-Brite pad or 0000 wire wool if you can't wait that long.

The back-routed vibrato floats slightly above the face of the body, much like a PRS, and even with pretty energetic bends the tuning stability impressed once everything had settled in.

Although there is only basic information available on the pickups, like the G300 Pro with its Seymour Duncan JB/Jazz combo, Cort's VTH77 set here captures a similar style: plenty of beef at the bridge and a more vintage-y voice at the neck. Cort tells us that 'FAT' isn't an acronym: "It just means that the tone it creates is FAT." With either humbucker engaged and a gainy amp, we'd call it fat, too.

The G290 FAT II might not be the catchiest-named guitar we've had in our hands, but it's hard to argue with at this price. The 2022 upgrades are very on-trend, and the combination of the different body construction and pickups gives it a slightly different sonic spin compared with the G300 Pro. It's a guitar with great potential for the studying player or anyone needing to cover a lot of ground, with plenty of potential for upgrading, too, not least with some name pickups. That said, its voices are surprisingly good, especially the big fat 'buckers.

VERDICT

It doesn't have the cachet of some of the trendier brands out there, but the build quality is certainly on a par and just as valid. Good craft and good sounds at a price that's temptingly affordable.

PROS

- Excellent build with quality hardware. Great neck and playability.

CONS

- No gigbag, but that's about it!

CONTACT

DYNAMIC MUSIC
Ph: (02) 9938 2072
Web: dynamicmusic.com.au

Trace Elliot Elf C110 Combo

TRACE'S ULTRA-COMPACT ELF HEAD WAS GOOD: CAN THE 1X10 COMBO MATCH UP? REVIEW BY **MIKE BROOKS**

RRP: $599

From the outset, Trace Elliot's Elf range was not designed to recreate the leviathan bass tones that we all remember from the '80s and '90s – that would be impossible.

What the range does offer are lightweight solutions to bassists of all levels, with bass amp heads, lightweight cabinets, and now two combos, one of which we have here. The 1x10 Elf may look diminutive – but looks can be deceiving. So how does it perform?

The unit itself is suitably well-dimensioned and lightweight, with the amp housed towards the rear of the combo so that the controls are well out of the way, creating a very tidy package.

It comes with a durable dust cover, is ruggedly constructed, and sports a heavy-duty leather handle on the top and a metal grille on the front of the unit.

Strangely, there are no corner protectors, although the unit appears capable of handling scuffs and knocks without affecting its appearance too much.

The amp section is simple to operate and clearly laid out, with controls for Gain, a three-band EQ and volume: simplicity is truly the name of the game here. The amp is fitted with a level indicator that indicates compression when it flashes red; on this note, the compressor monitors changes made to the EQ, so take this into account when pushing the EQ controls to their limits. Turning the Gain control to full brings an overdrive/distortion circuit into play, for some colorful, gritty tones.

A quick glance at the rear of the combo shows fan venting, a speaker/headphone selector switch, an additional jack speaker output and a balanced XLR DI output with an earth lift switch.

Its only downside as a home practice unit is the lack of an auxiliary input connection in the form of a 3.5mm audio socket or a USB connection, enabling the player to attach an external music source. An additional tweeter might also have improved things for bassists of the tapping persuasion, although that would have pushed the price up.

You may be looking at the power ratings and thinking 'How can I use this on a gig? It won't be loud enough.' Allow me to assure you that, having tested the amp with a selection of different basses, it's no shrinking violet in any sense.

The combo packs a solid punch, and is capable of projecting solid bottom-end, midrange character and biting clarity in the upper frequencies. I accept that it lacks the tonal control we all associate with Trace gear of the past, but then again, bass players' needs have changed over the years.

Testing a couple of five-string basses showed a strong fundamental tone delivery and, although the 10" speaker can only project so much, I found that the tones didn't suffer in a home practice or rehearsal environment.

The EQ frequencies have been sensibly selected and will address the needs of bassists who need a strong, robust bass tone that can be adjusted as required in a wide variety of performance settings.

In a live setting, the combo stood up well to a certain point – but inevitably there came a point where the physical limitations of the unit were holding it back. At this point, you should consider an extra cabinet to spread the overall load.

I've heard many of the 'fors' and 'againsts' when it comes to the Elf range – but I think this unit is a fine solution to the perennial requirement of a great-sounding, portable combo that delivers without costing a fortune, or needing two people to carry it.

Thankfully, technology has come a long way since the '80s and, although the Trace company as we once knew it is no more, the brand lives on. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Elf C110 is a powerful, punchy combo and, paired with an extra speaker, could well improve your gigging experience. A well-designed combo that's louder than you think.

▶ PROS

- Compact.
- Rugged.
- Simple to use.

▶ CONS

- A little pricey.
- Lacks aux in connection.
- You might need an extra cab for bigger gigs.

▶ CONTACT

PRO MUSIC AUSTRALIA
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Line 6 Catalyst 100 1x12 combo

LINE 6 SHAKES UP THE BUDGET DIGITAL COMBO MARKET WITH A NEW RANGE THAT PACKS HX-QUALITY AMP SOUNDS AND EFFECTS INTO HANDSOME CABINETS. REVIEW BY **NICK GUPPY**

Line 6 is one of the original pioneers of digital amp modelling with a history that stretches back to 1996 and the original AxSys 212. The company has returned to its roots with the Catalyst: a new range of affordable two-channel modelling amps that combine the latest HX voicing technology with guitarist-friendly features and controls.

Line 6 has always turned out good-looking amplifiers and the new Catalyst is no exception, with a particle-board cabinet trimmed in heavy-duty matt-black vinyl and a smart speaker grille with a subtle pattern picked out in sparkling thread. The grille and neo-classical logo add a touch of class, giving the Catalyst a smart-yet-restrained visual appeal. The generously deep cab supports a single rear-loaded 12-inch Line 6 HC100 loudspeaker that's been specially designed for the Catalyst. Its large ceramic magnet indicates there's no shortage of headroom on this amp.

The electronics are contained inside a robust steel U-shaped chassis that's bolted to the cabinet's top rear, with one side of the 'U' forming the top control panel. Everything is printed circuit as you'd expect and there are boards for the top and rear panel controls, plus a larger board on the base of the chassis for the power supply and output stage. It's all been neatly arranged and the assembly looks tough enough to handle live gigging.

Reassuringly, the Catalyst's control panel looks quite normal for a modelling amp. A single input jack feeds a rotary selector that accesses six original Line 6 amp voices, along with bank patches, effects and reverb types. Next, there's a Boost on/off switch with a level control, followed by familiar knobs for Gain, Bass, Mid, Treble, Presence and Channel Volume. Effects and reverb are managed by separate level controls and illuminated button switches that toggle the effects and reverb on or off and enter edit mode when held. A multi-coloured LED indicates which effects are active, while a third button enters tap tempo or activates the Catalyst's built-in tuner. The last control on the far right is a non-programmable master volume.

The rear-panel features include an Output Power selector offering full or half power, together with a 0.5-watt setting and a mute option for silent recording. Next to this is a USB 'B' connector, which hooks the Catalyst up to a desktop for recording or deep editing of patches using the Catalyst editor app. The Catalyst can

▶ VERDICT

At these prices and despite stiff competition, we think amp modelling has never sounded so good. Check one out and see if you agree.

▶ PROS

- Excellent HX-quality amp voices and effects. Familiar controls. Great choice for live and home use. Excellent direct output.

▶ CONS

- Some higher gain sounds are a little muddy and compressed when used with a real band.

▶ CONTACT

YAMAHA MUSIC AUSTRALIA
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be remote-controlled by MIDI. Alternatively, there's an optional two-button switch that swaps between the A and B channels and toggles the Boost function.

Other connectivity options include an aux in and headphones output, together with a series effects loop and a handy direct out on balanced XLR that has cab emulation and a ground lift switch. The Catalyst 100 is a smart-looking and well-presented amp that's ideal for live, studio and home use, and boasts all the features most players need and a clever simplified control panel.

The Catalyst's voices are original Line 6 amp designs, created using technology from its acclaimed HX library. They're called Clean, Boutique, Chime, Crunch, Dynamic and Hi Gain, and while there are no direct references to the classic amps that may or may not have been used for inspiration, your ears might pick out echoes of Fullerton, Santa Cruz, Bletchley, Dartford, Seattle (maybe) and Petaluma if you listen carefully.

The realism and responsiveness on offer is impressive. Our favourites are the Boutique amp type, which uses a voice called Aristocrat, and the superb Dynamic, which uses a voice called Kinetic. With careful dialling in, these virtual amps breathe and react convincingly like proper valve circuits to the extent that there's little noticeable difference at lower volume settings. Each voice also has its own custom boost function, with a programmable level control and on/off switch.

Used live, some of the higher gain sounds were a little muddy and we'd recommend using the excellent speaker compensated XLR output into a PA to improve definition. Recording with the Catalyst is quite easy using the XLR or USB outputs, with little or no extra treatment needed.

The effects are excellent with warm delays, lush choruses, a Uni-Vibe style effect and rotary speaker models combined with pitch shifting, fuzz and synth options. The level controls don't seem to have very much adjustment at the lower end of their travel, so the mix is either too little or too much. However, this is easy to correct from the editing app if needed.

The Catalyst has its own effects loop as well, which can be switched into 'power amp in' mode if you have an external multi-effects and just need the Catalyst's power and loudspeaker.

Programming is easy (after a quick read of the manual). The default setting for the Selector knob scrolls through the amp voices, and to access the Catalyst's bank patches, you hold down the manual button switch for a few seconds before turning the selector. Similar operations with the effects and reverb buttons access the Catalyst's 18 effects, arranged in three colour-coded groups of six for delay, modulation and pitch, with a separate group of six different reverb types including hall, chamber, room and spring types. Having sorted your sound, you save it for easy recall in either the A or B channel in any bank – simply press the A or B buttons on the top panel. Or you can leave the amp in Manual mode, in which case all the knobs and buttons are active.

The relative simplicity of the Catalyst's controls makes this a great amp to quickly grab a tone and go, while control freaks will be pleased to know the MIDI in socket accepts patch change and continuous controller commands. However, we think the optional two-button footswitch that toggles A/B channels and the boost is all most players will need.

There's another way to access the Catalyst's features, including quite a few that aren't on the control panel, and that's by using the Catalyst Edit app, which is available for Windows, Mac, iOS and Android. The app hooks up seamlessly via USB and provides a real-time display of the amp's settings, letting you select amp voices and effects and write them into the amp or save them offline.

While Line 6's Catalyst is familiar and straightforward to operate, there's just enough under the hood to satisfy those who like to tweak things. Consequently, it's great fun to use, despite a few relatively minor niggles, which could easily be corrected via future firmware upgrades. ag

RRP: $239

Carl Martin Panama British Hot Modded OD

CRANKED AMP TONES IN A COMPACT, VERSATILE FORMAT. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**

Carl Martin is known for some pretty decent overdrive pedals, in particular the Plexitone. The Panama's Brit tones probably owe a lot to that pedal, as well as to the classic amp that inspired it, of course.

You get the standard Gain, Level and Tone knobs here, but the unique feature of this pedal is the Damping knob, which is designed to tighten up the sound.

Basically, it works on the bottom-end, and turning it from its fully counterclockwise position will start to reduce any woofiness for an altogether leaner, more aggressive sound.

There's a wide range of tones available here, from a clean boost through all levels of amp-like drive to high-gain with plenty of sustain.

The Tone knob is very effective in matching the pedal's tone to your own amp and would make a fine complementary extra channel for a clean or driven amp, depending on where you set the Gain knob. ag

▶ VERDICT

Classic British drive that adjusts to take you from looser to tight and focused tones.

▶ PROS

- Damping knob tightens things up nicely.
- Amp-like drive.
- Cost-effective.
- Compact.

▶ CONS

- There is a lot of competition.

▶ CONTACT

INNOVATIVE MUSIC
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Rick Springfield onstage at the Mill Run Theater, Niles, Illinois, September 6, 1981

HOW I WROTE... "JESSIE'S GIRL"

RICK SPRINGFIELD BUCKS CONVENTION WITH HIS SURPRISE 1981 CHART-TOPPER.

BY **JOE BOSSO**

"Honestly, I didn't have any idea it would be a hit, let alone a song that has endured for decades," singer and guitarist Rick Springfield says about 'Jessie's Girl,' the pop-rock ear-candy smash from his 1981 album, Working Class Dog, that propelled him to international stardom. "When I wrote it, I thought it was a good album song, that was about it. When radio stations started playing it and it became this giant hit, I was as amazed as anybody."

MOOT SUIT

By the late '70s, the Australian-born Springfield (he was born in the western Sydney suburb of Guildford, but lived in Broadmeadow, Victoria for most of his childhood) had issued a couple of albums that failed to chart. After a move to L.A., he concentrated on acting while taking classes in stained glass with his friend Gary and Gary's girlfriend, who inspired this song's lyrics. Springfield can't recall the woman's name but says he dubbed his pal "Jessie" because the man had a T-shirt with football player Ron Jessie's name on it. While pop ballads and disco ruled radio at the time, he'd begun to hear more guitar music on the airwaves. "AC/DC and punk stuff like Elvis Costello was getting played," he says, "so I thought, Screw it. I'm going to write guitar-based songs that I like. We'll see what happens."

Inspired by his love of the Kinks' 'You Really Got Me,' Springfield started playing with an opening riff idea that sounded anthemic. "It had these big fat chords," he says, "but I knew I couldn't sing over it, because it's really hard to do that over crossing chords. That's when I wrote what became the first section."

Next, Springfield turned to another section he had originally written on the piano. "I noticed it was in the same key as the other song," he explains, "so I decided I could marry them and they would work." Once he had the basic structure down, he recorded a demo on his four-track machine. "I couldn't play drums, so I beat out a rhythm on a cushion and EQ'd it to make sound like a kick and a snare. I played a cheap bass that I got at a pawn shop. For distorted guitar, I used one of the original Pignose amps, and it sounded great."

Famously, 'Jessie's Girl' is one of the rare instances in which the word moot is used as a rhyme: "You know I feel so dirty when they start talking cute/I wanna tell her that I love her, but the point is probably moot." Says Springfield, "I probably sent kids to the dictionary with that. I originally had a rhyme using bathing suit, but that was cliché."

THANK YOUR LOCAL DJ

Springfield played his demos for producer Keith Olsen, who was riding high on the charts with records for Foreigner, Fleetwood Mac and Pat Benatar, and he agreed to work with him. Sessions for the track went smoothly ("We did a couple of passes and had it down," Springfield said), with the arrangement staying close to the demo, except for the guitar solo.

"I tried doing my own AC/DC-type solo, but it was a lot of noodling," he says. "Keith brought in Neil Giraldo, from Pat Benatar's band. Neil came up with a solo that was really musical and fit the vibe of the song perfectly. He was absolutely brilliant."

Olsen had always championed 'Jessie's Girl' as a single, but neither Springfield nor his label, RCA, agreed. "I thought it might be too complicated for radio," Springfield says. "But then DJs started playing it and the phones rang. The DJs called the label and said, 'Might not be a bad idea to release this as a single.' That's when RCA jumped on it."

RESPECT

After waiting years for success, Springfield saw the stars align in the summer of 1981. Along with strong radio play, the video for 'Jessie's Girl' became a mainstay on the newly launched MTV, and he quickly shot to household-name status thanks to his role as Dr. Noah Drake on the ABC daytime soap General Hospital, all of which helped drive the single to number one.

"It was crazy," Springfield says. "I went from nobody knowing me to being recognized everywhere. No matter what anyone says, you're not prepared for that." Over the years, 'Jessie's Girl' has been featured in Paul Thomas Anderson's Boogie Nights, and Springfield took part in the video for Coheed and Cambria's tribute, 'Jessie's Girl 2.' "It's been great to see the song's evolution to respectability," he says. "It went from teen pop to people thinking that it had real substance. I can't complain."

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